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XXVII.

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VIZETELLY'S ONE-VOLUME NOVELS.

XXVII.

W I L L.

BY

GEORGES OHNET,

AUTHOR OF "THE IRONMASTER;" "COUNTESS SARAH;" "PRINCE SERGE PANINE," ETC.



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CHAPTER I.

It was half-past seven in the evening, and darkness was slowly creeping over the sky still glowing with the flush of the setting sun. Along the boulevards flowed a tide of busy men, which formed now and again into great eddies when for an instant its course was stopped by the sale of papers before some kiosk. The tables outside the cafés were crowded, while in and out between the chairs passed the itinerant vendors of walking-sticks and canes, with the horn or steel handles of their wares protruding from the large green serge cases they carried strapped across their shoulders ; women lounged by, obviously intending to continue their promenade until they had received, more or less promptly, an invitation to dinner in one of the neighbouring restaurants ; and the three-horse omnibuses carefully threaded their way along the road amidst the lines of cabs which were being continually stopped at the corners of the larger thoroughfares to allow the throng of foot-passengers to cross over, and the rolling of the wheels, the even trot of the horses, the street-sellers' cries, the murmur of the crowd, all united to form a sound of happiness, for the great town after the work and noise and turmoil of the day

was now about to enter the calm and silence and rest of the night.

Avoiding the groups and elbowing the passers-by with that dexterity and smiling audacity peculiar to Parisians, two young men, dressed in the height of fashion, were making their way in the opposite direction to the stream which was flowing towards the *Chaussée d'Antin*. They seemed to be seeking some one in the crowd, and when they reached the *Passage Jouffroy* they stood for a moment, hesitating.

"I can't see her any longer," said the elder of the two.

"Oh, well, don't let's stand here," returned his companion, and they continued their walk.

"Besides," resumed the second speaker, "I don't know of anything more stupid or more useless than following a woman in the street. Either she's no good, and then there's nothing interesting in the business, or else she's thoroughly respectable, and then the affair can't possibly lead to anything, so that any way it's only time and trouble wasted."

"My dear fellow, I must remind you that in the present case we were wasting neither time nor trouble, since the charming individual who has occupied our attention for the last five minutes was taking us our own way. It's always a pleasant sight to see a Frenchwoman walking along, and this one had the proud elastic step of a thoroughbred."

"Upon my word, you talk as if she were one of your racing mares."

"Well, it's no insult either to the woman, or to——ah! there she is!"

Delayed for a moment by the difficult crossing at the

Faubourg Montmartre, the unconscious object of the two men's attention was now quickly walking up the boulevard towards the Faubourg Poissonnière. Here the pavement was not so crowded, and the two friends were able to draw nearer and inspect at their ease the fair unknown. Her dress was more than simple; a short, close-fitting cloth jacket and a brown skirt perfectly untrimmed, but tastefully draped; on her chestnut hair a black straw hat with neither strings, feathers, nor flowers, while a thick veil covered her face, making it impossible to see whether she was pretty or not. Her dress betokened a very humble position in life; she might have been a milliner's assistant, a maid in some tradesman's family, or perhaps a poor music-mistress returning from her daily work, but her walk had a certain grace and elegance calculated to inspire doubts as to the tale her costume revealed, and she looked more like some lady of high degree dressed in borrowed clothes. She was walking quickly, neither loitering nor looking in the shops, and her firm footsteps rang out clear and quick on the asphalte.

The two friends were now walking even with her, glancing now and again at her from the corners of their eyes, without daring to let her see that they were paying any attention to her, and restrained by a sudden sense of respect as if they felt she was a young and innocent girl. They were unable to distinguish her features, but her eyes looked dark and soft through the tulle veil which fell to the serious, almost sad-looking mouth, and the only part of the face which was visible and well defined was a smooth, white chin, firm to severity and somewhat haughty. In fine the girl might

turn out to be ugly, but anyone would have sworn that she must be pretty.

"I say," said the younger of the two men, "if she goes on towards the Porte Saint-Denis, mind we don't go after her. I don't want to follow in her wake as far as the Bastille."

They had reached the corner of the Faubourg Poissonière, where the girl made an almost imperceptible pause before the gutter, which was rather wide just there ; then, raising her skirt a little, she sprang over lightly and gracefully, giving the two friends a glimpse of an exquisitely turned ankle as she did so, and once on the opposite pavement she began to walk quickly down the Faubourg Poissonière.

"Why, she is going to your grandmother's house," said the elder man, laughing.

"Unless she is going to the Conservatoire."

"No, she wouldn't have crossed over."

A few quick steps brought them to the girl's side. Then a kind of magnetic sympathy sprang up between them ; she turned her tranquil eyes towards the two men, noticed their look of interest, guessed their curiosity, and her mouth became set and hard. She started and seemed to draw herself together as though annoyed but not frightened, then hastening her steps, she distanced her pursuers and suddenly turned into the gateway of a large house. The two friends came up almost as soon as she did, and at the gate they stopped abruptly, then looked at each other and began to laugh.

"Well ! I told you so. She is going to your grandmother's."

"She has gone into the doorkeeper's room. Let's wait a minute, she'll be out again directly."

At that very moment she reappeared, holding in her hand a key—of her room no doubt—and a parcel wrapped in some gray material. As she saw the two men standing by the door, apparently watching her, she could not repress a movement of vexation, then averting her head, as though to show her displeasure, she went up a little staircase on the right of the doorkeeper's lodge and disappeared.

"She evidently lives in the house," said the younger man, "and yet it is the first time I have met her. Up in the attics there are some very small rooms, and no doubt she's some work-girl. Any way the chase is ended, for I don't suppose you want to follow her up five flights of stairs to have her door shut in your face at the end of your journey ; so let's go to dinner."

"But at least ask the doorkeeper what her name is."

"Oh, I will do that for you," and the young man opened the door of the lodge, where a white-headed old man was sitting in a large leather arm-chair reading the evening paper. His face lighted up with a broad smile as he recognised his visitor, and he at once rose to his feet, at the same time taking off his cap.

"Père Anselme, who is that girl who has just come out of your room ?"

"Mademoiselle Hélène, one of the fifth-floor lodgers, Monsieur Louis ; a brave, good, and quiet girl. She works at some millinery shop all day, and then employs herself in the evening by making lace, sitting at it sometimes till midnight. My wife keeps her room tidy for her, and we call her Mademoiselle Hélène, though her surname is Graville. She has lived here for the last eighteen months, but she is so quiet people don't notice her, and we only

see her twice a day,—in the morning when she goes to the shop, and then when she comes back in the evening.”

“Thanks, Père Anselme,” said the young man, seeing that the doorkeeper was preparing to give him a complete biography of the fifth-floor lodger. And with a friendly nod to the old servant he rejoined his companion.

“Well, she is called Hélène Graville, and works at a milliner’s. She is quiet, orderly, and highly edifies the doorkeeper by her diligence, so if you feel inclined to marry her—”

“Oh, go to the deuce!”

“Then let’s go to dinner. It is half-past seven and we shall be keeping my grandmother waiting, and she doesn’t like that,” and they turned towards the steps of a mansion at the other end of the courtyard.

Facing on the one side the Faubourg Poissonnière and on the other an immense garden which reaches nearly to the Rue d’Hauteville, the Hôtel Hérault-Gandon was built during the reign of Louis XV by La Grimonière the financier, who used it as his country house. A little river, of which there is no longer any trace, ran through the park, feeding on its way some marble basins which stood on the present site of some of the houses in the Rue d’Enghien. After the Coup d’Etat of 1852 the house was bought by Hérault-Gandon, the large manufacturer whose metal workshops are the most important in Saint-Denis, and has been for the last thirty years the family residence, its present occupants being Madame Hérault and her grandson Louis, the only heir to both name and fortune.

Ascending the flight of steps, Louis and his friend entered a large, paved hall, the door of which was opened to them by a footman in black livery.

"Are we late?" asked the young man, taking some letters and papers from a silver salver.

"Madame and Mademoiselle Lereboulley have been at dinner about a quarter of a hour."

"Oh, if Emilie is here it's all right," said Louis, turning to his friend.

They went up the large flight of stone stairs covered by a thick, soft carpet to a lofty gallery, at the entrance of which the *maître d'hôtel*, grave and solemn as a head-clerk, was sitting at a carved wood table. He rose, took the young men's overcoats and sticks, and led them without a word into the drawing-room, through which they passed between tables laden with costly china, screens carefully placed to ward off draughts from doors and windows and sofas and easy-chairs arranged in pleasing disorder, towards the dining-room. In the large white marble fireplace, with its ornaments of gilded bronze, a fire was burning brightly, but one of the windows was open, and through it entered the fresh smell of budding leaves and trees. Near a low, softly-cushioned sofa stood a basket lined with embroidered satin, in which a dog with long silvery hair lay sleeping. As he heard the two men's footsteps he opened a sleepy eye, then, recognising them as friends, feebly wagged his tail and again fell into his comfortable torpor. From the dining-room came the murmur of voices and the sound of silver and china. Louis opened the door, and letting his friend pass in before him—

"Will you have us?" he asked, gaily. "Or must we go and dine at a restaurant?"

"Ah, here you are at last, you bad boy," cried his

grandmother, jumping up. "How do you do, Monsieur de Thauziat? Sit down by Emilie," and clapping her little withered hands together to hasten the servants,

"Quick, lay two more places," she said.

Then she took her grandson by the arm, as if to assure herself that he would not go away again, and placed him by her side, her face beaming with affection. She was a very little woman, shrivelled up with age; her hair was white, but her fresh colour and bright eyes gave her every appearance of health. Her dress was black and very simply made and round her shoulders she wore a knitted woollen shawl. Altogether, she looked like a humble tradesman's wife in this handsome dining-room, decorated by exquisite panels from the brush of Largillière, and on the domed ceiling of which Coypel had painted a representation of the war between the gods and the Titans.

"There, Emilie," she said gleefully. "We thought we were going to dine all alone, and now we have a compact little party of four."

It was to a girl of weakly and delicate appearance, seated at the opposite side of the table, that Madame Hérault addressed herself, whose prominent chin, tightened lips and pointed nose would have clearly betokened a malicious and ill-natured disposition, had not a broad and intellectual forehead, crowned by a wealth of fair hair, contradicted by its nobility the forbidding aspect of the lower part of the face. This head, remarkable for its contradictions, was supported by a slender, somewhat ill-proportioned body, to which were attached two long, thin arms, terminating in tiny hands, adorned by some magni-

ficent rings. As to Emilie's dress, it was extremely elegant, but worn with none of that grace which characterises the woman whose desire it is to please. She seemed to have given up every pretension to beauty, and, aware of her want of personal charms, to have become resigned to being nothing but a friend of the opposite sex. Most would have thought her thirty years of age but she was not yet twenty-five.

The only daughter of Sébastien Lereboulley, senator, ex-minister, and one of Europe's greatest financiers, she had lost her mother when quite a child, and, brought up by an English governess, had fallen into habits of independence which her father's affection had served to encourage, for, absorbed by the cares of his enormous financial transactions, occupied by politics, and carried away by a taste for affairs of a gallant nature—a taste which even his ripe age had not tempered—Lereboulley had allowed Emilie, whom he idolised, to live as she chose, surrounded by artists and sharing their love of the arts and search for the beautiful. It seemed as if this girl, formed by nature in so homely a mould, had determined to make up for the ungainliness of her body by the brilliancy of her intellect. She had a talent for sculpture and painting which would have assured the future of any poor artist working for his living, yet exhibited but rarely, not wishing, so she said to compete with those dependent on their profession. Her caustic wit made her feared in society (where her immense fortune always secured her a circle of admirers), but she never attacked the timid, reserving her biting phrases for the scheming and the proud. Her hand had been asked in marriage by the most eligible men of aristocratic and financial circles alike, but she dismissed all her suitors,

saying that she had too much pride to consent to any but a love-match, and too much sense not to know that such a match was impossible. Still this bitter argument, which betrayed an affectionate nature warped by regrets proudly hidden, had not discouraged the aspirants, and their ranks were being continually swelled by men who hoped that a moment of lassitude, an instant of vexation, would at last open this hand hitherto so firmly closed.

Of all those who surrounded her, only two could flatter themselves that they were the objects of Mademoiselle Lereboulley's preference, and these chosen ones had just entered the dining-room of the Hôtel Hérault. The one, Louis, had been her friend from childhood and was treated by Emilie as if he were indeed her brother; the other, Clément de Thanziat, a more recent acquaintance who had been clever or independent enough not to pose as a would-be lover, had secured the half-teasing, half-tender attention of the clever girl, and he found himself now caressed by affectionate words, now lashed by some scathing sarcasm, for with him Mademoiselle Lereboulley was like a cat, sometimes using her claws, sometimes with paws of velvet, though an observer would have soon perceived that the use of the claws was the more frequent. But at any rate he occupied her attention, and that in itself was a triumph.

Besides, he was worldly-wise and knew how to defend himself, for, although he still looked quite young, he had reached his fortieth year. He was a dark, handsome man, with black eyes, curled beard, and face like an Arab's, affecting in his dress an extreme quietness which gave him an air of great distinction. He had come to Paris when very young and had boldly entered the ranks of large

speculators, disposing of considerable capital, though no one was aware that he possessed any actual fortune. Lereboulley thought a great deal of him ; they had met in gay society, and Thauziat had at once constituted himself the elder man's preceptor and guide, and, thoroughly initiated himself, had pointed out to the financier all the turns and by-ways of the Isle of Pleasures, while the financier, in return, had shown him the road to fortune.

Lereboulley and Thauziat, therefore, had lived in close intimacy for the last ten years, and each could have related a good many tales about the other, some funny, others terrible—battles of love and battles of money, the former of which had been fought in boudoirs hung with lace, and the latter won on the cold paving-stones of the Stock Exchange. Men did not think they were so near the truth when they said jokingly, "It is the corpses they are answerable for that make Thauziat and Lereboulley such close friends," but they never made such jokes before Thauziat who was one of the best fencers in Paris, and who, with the pistol, would break as many saucers as you chose at thirty paces. In short, he was a splendid type of an adventurer who had somehow wandered into this petty, money-grasping generation, over which he contemptuously ruled by his beauty, his daring and his intellect. Had he lived in the fifteenth instead of the nineteenth century, he would have been one of those superb condottieri, who formed for themselves kingdoms in the territories they had conquered, and, patrons of architects, sculptors, and artists, built cities of marble, then peopled them with statues and decorated them with paintings which now form the pride of modern galleries. He had the breadth and strength of

character of a Sforza or a Colonna, but, cramped and fettered by a narrow civilization, his eagle wings had no room to expand, though still there was an air of such boldness and strength about him that at the first glance a clear-sighted eye would have singled him out from his companions as the most remarkable man of the group.

He loved to possess the best of everything, and never did a man spend money with so refined a dilettantism. He had had built for himself in the Avenue d'Antin an *hôtel* which was the most charming bachelor's abode in Paris, and whose walls he had hung with pictures which, apart from their artistic value, were all of celebrated origin and had all passed through the hands of the great amateurs of art. No house was better kept up than his; his horses carried off prize after prize at the *Concours Hippique*, while on the race-course his colours were generally first past the winning-post. His good luck had merited for him a great deal of bitter hatred, over which he triumphed, and as much admiration, which he turned to his advantage. In this century, over which the commonplace reigns, he stood out because of his originality, and, through that alone, formed one of the twelve or fifteen noticeable men in Paris. The mere fact of his having bestowed his friendship on Louis Hérault had been sufficient to place the latter above the common level, and, in a day, Clément's companion became someone of importance by simply reflecting the rays of the greater star.

They had become acquainted at Vienna under somewhat extraordinary circumstance. Thauziat, who was on his way back from Carlsbad, had accepted an invitation to supper at the house of Carlotta Brunnen, one of Europe's

most celebrated dancers, whither Louis Hérault, also merely passing through the town on his way to Moravia for grouse-shooting, was taken by Lord Eddisley, a club friend of his, and Thauziat and he found themselves the only Frenchmen in a party composed almost entirely of Germans. Just then was a time of great anxiety for France. War seemed on the point of breaking out and the unexpected interference of the Czar was alone restraining the army of invaders ready to spread themselves beyond the Vosges. Clément de Thauziat, accustomed to shine in whatever society he happened to be, did not seem to notice the predominance of the German element and displayed all the graces of his wit as though he had been surrounded by friends. The feminine portion of the *réunion*, for women are generally cosmopolitan when a handsome man is in question, had at once gone over to his side, and the favour with which he was only too apparently regarded contributed in no small degree to the ill-temper of the other guests. But gradually his *verve* dissipated the clouds and carried all before it; at two o'clock the supper, which had been commenced at midnight, was at the highest point of gaiety, and the mistress of the house chose this moment to drink the health of him who had become master of the revels. If Carlotta had simply filled her glass in honour of Thauziat, no doubt every one present would have followed the pretty dancer's example without the slightest hesitation; but she was imprudent enough to wish to include Louis Hérault in her token of regard, and, uniting the two compatriots in the same toast, she cried, "Gentlemen, let us drink to our French friends!"

There happened to be present two German military

attachés, one a high-born Bavarian baron, six feet high, with hair as yellow as his country's beer, the other a little thick-set Prussian captain, who still looked surly and peevish, although he was nearly drunk. In the midst of the acclamations of all the other guests there came a loud crash—both officers' glasses had just fallen on the table smashed to atoms. There was a moment of embarrassed silence, then Clément said in his calm tones—

“These gentlemen are no longer thirsty, perhaps a little air would do them good.”

He had risen to his feet, as had also the two Germans. Signing Louis to follow him—

“Go on with your supper,” he said, with a smile, “we will rejoin you in a minute.”

Turning towards a window which had been opened on account of the heat, he passed out on to the balcony, at the foot of which flowed a little loop of the Danube which was clearly reflecting the stars on this splendid summer night, lighted a cigarette and began to talk with all the *sang-froid* imaginable to the Bavarian Goliath. From the room, they could see him smile as his companion, looking very red, shook his head in token of refusal. Louis, on his side, had taken the little captain in hand. What demands and what answers were exchanged during this conversation, no one knew, but, at the end of a few seconds, two cries were heard and only the two Frenchmen could still be seen on the balcony. Then they re-entered the dining-room, and Thauziat said very calmly—

“There was a mistake. The gentlemen were still thirsty ; they are now drinking.”

Some of the men rushed out and found the baron and

the captain at the foot of the balcony struggling in two feet of mud.

The next morning, in a little wood near Schoenbrun, the Bavarian, who had decided to fight with sabres, received from Thauziat, who was proficient in every mode of fencing, a thrust which would have called forth the admiration of every fencing-master in the German universities. As for Louis, he left a ball in the captain's thigh, and from that day Thauziat and Hérault were inseparable.

It was a question if this friendship was good for Louis, whose weakness of character demanded a wiser mentor than this formidable man of the world, but one cannot change one's fate, and it was written that, in the future, the lives of Clément and Louis should mingle in a tragic fashion.

For the time being, however, they were both sitting very peacefully in the handsome dining-room of the Hôtel Hérault, using their good appetites to try and catch up the two ladies who had half-finished their dinner, and who were now looking at their two unhopèd-for guests with frank delight.

"And now, you naughty boy," said Madame Hérault, "will you have the kindness to tell me what you have been doing for the last seven days? For it's a week now since I last saw you."

"I have been to Ascot, grandmother, with Clément. We went to watch the running of a filly he thinks a great deal of—a daughter of Baronnette by Turlupin."

"And when did you return?"

"To-day."

"Your train must have been very late, since you were

not able to be in time for dinner," said his grandmother, with a smile.

"Oh, we reached Paris this morning, but I went to Saint-Denis to see how things were going on. Then I dressed at the club, and we should have been here quite by seven o'clock, if, on the way, Thauziat had not taken it into his head to follow a little milliner's girl he liked the look of."

"Ah, ah, Monsieur Clément!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Lereboulley, while her grey eyes sparkled. "Now we are going to hear all about your misdoings. So you follow girls in the street now, my fine fellow? Why, what pleasures can you be reserving for your old age?"

Thauziat shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't listen to the calumnies of that young rogue—he simply wants to blacken me in your eyes. And since he dares to attack me, I will tell tales of him. We are late because he was thoroughly determined to call on Lady Olifaunt before coming here."

"And did you see the beautiful Diana?" asked Mademoiselle Lereboulley, with an ironic smile.

"No, she was still asleep."

"And it was seven o'clock in the evening? Oh, yes, that's her way; she is going to a ball to-night, and wants to look fresh, so she stays in bed all day. She is as careful of her beauty as if it were some valuable jewel; what a pity she cannot lock it up in a casket with her diamonds, and only bring it out the hours she wishes to triumph! But each year, each day, each hour, leaves some mark on her precious person, and so, as she cannot arrest the flight of time, Diana limits the number of hours during

which she is exposed to the fatigue which might produce a wrinkle. Her business is to look after her beauty ; she has a head-clerk already—her husband, the Honourable Sir James—and one of these days she will have a regular office, simply for information.”

“ Emilie ! ” exclaimed Louis, reproachfully. “ You never lose an opportunity of saying something ill-natured about Lady Olifaunt.”

“ But my father is so good-natured to her ! And I suppose she does not think she can have the good-will of all the family ? ”

This answer caused a few moments embarrassment, during which the harsh laugh with which Emilie emphasized her allusion was alone heard. Then Louis said, to change the conversation,

“ I warn you, grandmother, that the humble beauty Thauziat so hotly pursued is one of your tenants ; she lives in the wing overlooking the Faubourg.”

“ Who told you so ? ”

“ The doorkeeper.”

Madame Hérault raised her little wrinkled hands as high as her flowered cap.

“ Well, that’s nice ! ” she said somewhat sharply. “ Now mind, Thauziat, I forbid you to make any scandal in my house ; the girl may be perfectly good.”

“ Anselme bears witness to that, and besides she is too simply dressed to be anything but honest. When she is under Clément’s protection she will put aside her little woollen dresses, and we shall see a brougham at her door, to prevent other members of the Thauziat species following her in the street.”

"And what is the name of this fortunate lodger who attracts the attention of our critic of elegance?" asked Mademoiselle Lereboulley. "You doubtless found out while you were engaged with the doorkeeper?"

"Her christian name is Hélène, as was that of the woman who once made such trouble in Greece and Asia," replied Louis gaily; "and her surname, Graville."

"Graville!" interrupted old Madame Hérault. "That was the name of the village where I was born, and there was a family De Graville who lived in the château. But the heir was a boy, and I never knew of a girl called Hélène."

"If you had known her, grandmother, she would have been over sixty by now, and the person in question is quite young."

"Ah, yes," said Madame Hérault, laughing, "but old people speak of the past as if it were yesterday. Life passes so quickly that one thinks one is still what one has been, and when people say, 'Oh, but that was half-a-century ago,' it always takes one by surprise. Half-a-century ago! just when I married your grandfather. Madame de Graville had a great deal to do with that, and I was very much indebted to her. I ought not to have lost sight of her, but Hérault wanted to come to Paris, and after he had gone into business I forgot the village, the château, and the lady who had been so good to me. That is the way with so many people—they seem ungrateful, when they have only been very busy, but if this girl should belong to the family of which I am speaking, we shall have to acquit ourselves towards her of the debt."

"There will not be much difficulty about that," said Louis, "for she seems poor. And then Clément will have

played the part of Providence, by putting us on the track of a descendant of the Gravilles you knew, only you must remember in Normandy there are as many Gravilles as there are apple-trees almost, it is a very common name."

"Well, I will find out."

They had finished dinner, and the drawing-room door had been opened. Old Madame Hérault rose from the table, and passing briskly into the other room without taking the arm of either Clément or her grandson, left Emilie to follow with the two young men. Coffee was placed on a small table.

"Do the honours to the two gentlemen, my dear," said the old lady to Emilie, "and then, if they will favour us with their society, allow them to smoke their horrid cigarettes."

"Emilie would be very sorry if we did not do so," said Louis, "for then she could not smoke herself."

"That is a graceful way of once more drawing attention to my bad bringing-up, I suppose?" interrupted Mademoiselle Lereboulley. Then, with a certain bitter melancholy, she continued :

"Do once for all make up your mind to treat me as some one apart. There is nothing of the woman about me, so I wish to enfranchise myself as much as possible from the subjection imposed upon my sex, and I mean to be as independent in my ways as I choose. I am deprived of every little feminine pleasure, I cannot give my mind to dressing and adorning myself, it would be grotesque with my appearance. No one makes love to me—oh, I mean sincerely and for myself, for my dowry has many admirers, but when some brave man, who has made up his mind to

marry me in spite of my plainness, says to me with a sigh, 'Ah, mademoiselle, how charming you are!' I transpose the music of his romance, and I hear, 'Ah, Mademoiselle, how rich you are!' Then I send the lover and his amorous speculation to the right abouts, and I seek compensation for my mental sorrows in the pleasures of liberty. I go out when I please, and I go where I like, I drive my horses myself, I read everything, and I discuss everything, I smoke with my friends, and I am almost as bad as you are yourself, my little Louis, bad morals excepted, of course, and it is no credit to me, either."

She turned a *pirouette*, which displayed all her puny deformity, then, with a burst of laughter, drew from her pocket a very pretty silver case from which she took a Russian cigarette, and, having lighted it, blew the smoke into her companion's face.

"You have omitted to mention one of your faults, even now, Mademoiselle Lereboulley," said Thauziat, quietly.

"And which one is that?"

"You boast and brag of being bad a great deal more than others do of being good, and with much less truth. With all your pretensions to wickedness, you are very good-natured."

"It is not true!" exclaimed Emilie, violently. "Besides, why do you think I am? I scorn and hate humanity, which, to me, seems stupid, wicked and cowardly."

"You are not far wrong, but you are too intelligent not to make exceptions to that rule. And it is a proof of what I say, that we found you here, keeping Madame Hérault company while her grandson was away."

The old lady clapped her little withered hands together.

"Well said, Monsieur de Thauziat!" she cried gleefully. "She was caught in the very act; but so are you too, for with all your vaunted egoism, you came to dine with a tiresome old woman like me, instead of going to your club, where you would have found all your friends, and now you are staying the evening to enliven her."

Thauziat smiled, and shook his handsome dark head.

"No, Madame Hérault, don't credit me with any self-abnegation. I came to dine with you because you have a good cook, and I am staying to play a game of *bésique* with you, because you play well, that is all."

The old lady's eyes sparkled, and turning to her grandson—

"Then, Louis, give us the card-table!"

"Well, grandmother, we can stay till eleven o'clock," said Louis, "so try and beat Thauziat."

"Make yourself easy on that point; and you, Clement, behave yourself!"

They commenced to play, and Emilie and Louis seated themselves in a corner of the room. For a moment they were silent, she abstractedly smoking, he following a train of thought, which carried him far away from this quiet house which even the noise of the city did not reach across the deserted courtyards and gardens. He could see the smiling image of a golden-haired woman, with rosy face from which shone out two eyes of heavenly blue. Gracefully she swayed to and fro, light as an apparition or the white phantom of a dream, with a provoking, enigmatical smile, as she seemed to say: "Dare to love me! If you confess to me that you desire me and long for me, who knows what I may answer you? Although I appear statuesque

and icy, I am glowing with passion, but I show it only to him who adores me. Take me in your arms and you will feel the beating of my heart. Be bold, it is the secret of success!" Then, suddenly, beside the first, appeared another form, at once threatening and grotesque—that of her husband, the honourable Sir James, as Emilie derisively called him, with his frizzly red hair, his face crimsoned by port-wine and his little, piercing, mocking, black eyes. He was stiff and phlegmatic, affecting irreproachable manners, and always speaking of his integrity, like a man who will not permit the very shadow of a doubt to manifest itself. Towards the beautiful Diana he was paternal, and, though he showered tender epithets upon her, he was plainly little enough of a husband not to discourage his wife's adorers. When there was no smile to give his face an expression of happiness his countenance was of sinister harshness.

Who and what were this man and woman who had suddenly appeared in Parisian society two years ago, with every appearance of wealth? They occupied a mansion in the Avenue Gabriel, drove about in splendidly appointed carriages, gave dinner-parties every Tuesday, and were "At home" afterwards in the evening. Emilie's father, the senator Lereboulley—a man of about sixty, with a huge body, and hair too intense a black for its colour to be natural—was very intimate in the house. He took flowers and sweetmeats to the beautiful English woman, and called her Diana, and the Olifaunts had no doubt an account at his bank, for cheques signed "Lereboulley" had several times been seen in the hands of Sir James.

Another frequent visitor at the house was Thauziat, and when anyone questioned him about Sir James, he replied that the baronet belonged to a good Yorkshire family, and that his marriage had been one of love, his wife having been the daughter of a Protestant clergyman. He had known both husband and wife a long while, and it was chiefly owing to him that they had made so many pleasant acquaintances since they had lived in Paris. It was by him that Lereboulley had been presented to Diana.

Several times Louis had tried to question Clément about his English friends, but the latter had always dismissed the subject with a haughty nonchalance which made it difficult to insist. However, Louis had thought it a good stroke of diplomacy on his part to confide his growing passion for Lady Olifaunt to Thauziat and Lereboulley; and to his confession Clément had coldly replied, "Well, then, make love to her;" while the senator had knitted his brows into a heavy frown, and excitedly exclaimed, "Why, my dear fellow, you must be mad! She's as straight as can be!"

So what could he believe? Whom could he trust? Appearances were in favour of the Olifaunts, who led a perfectly open life, were surrounded by friends, and would have drawn no attention to themselves, save for a dash of eccentricity very excusable in foreigners. And yet the Parisian's instincts put him on his guard, and he still preserved an odd suspicion that Diana might in reality be an adventuress flying at high game, and Sir James a *chevalier d'industrie* living on the fruits of his wife's misconduct.

Louis heaved a sigh.

"The heart that sighs does not possess what it desires," said Emilie, throwing away her cigarette. "I bet you I know of whom you are thinking."

"Well, who is it?" asked the young man, blinking his eyes as if he were just awaking.

"Our dear Diana. Isn't that right?"

"Yes."

"Then to reward me for my good guess, tell me where you are to meet this evening. For of course you are going to the same house."

"Then you must not tell anyone, for it is a secret. We are going to the masked ball at Count Woréseff's."

"But there will be nothing but fast women there!" exclaimed Emilie, with an expression of shocked surprise. "Do you mean to say the modest Diana would show herself at such a place?"

"In the first place, there will be only the best known actresses there—"

"Well? What did I say?" interrupted Mademoiselle Lereboulley.

"Secondly," continued Louis, "a great many women of the best society will be present simply to satisfy their curiosity—under a mask, you know nearly everything is permissible. Besides, Lady Olifaunt will be well looked after. Without counting Sir James—"

"Oh, no, don't let's count him!"

"There will be your father—"

"My majestic and senatorial papa! What is he going to do there? I suppose he will let a lot of women get sundry bank-notes out of him at cards—"

“And Thauziat, and, finally, your humble servant. You see that with so many protectors—”

“Diana will be in great danger.”

“Emilie ! you are not serious ?”

“And are you yourself ? According to you, this ball is to be a most desirable *réunion*—a choice mixture of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and the Faubourg Montmartre. In fact, a place where any mother could take her daughter. How charming !”

She leant towards her companion, and continued in her most persuasive tones—

“Then take me, Louis, dear. I am dying to go.”

“You are joking.”

“No, for once I am not.”

“But, my dear girl, you have no card of invitation.”

“That’s a good excuse ! Seeing me on your arm, who would dare to make any remark ? You can tell Woréseff that I am La Belle Fatma disguised as a Parisian. You will see no one will know me in a domino, and it would be so amusing ! I should puzzle everyone so, I know so much about most of the people who will be there. Well, is it agreed ? I sha’n’t be the least restraint upon you, you shall be quite free, and as for me—well, if anyone testifies the least want of respect towards me—”

She drew herself up, then concluded like some schoolboy,

“He’ll be jolly well taken in !”

“Very well, then,” said Louis, “I’ll take you, but on one condition—that you tell me what you know about Lady Olifaunt.”

Emilie’s face clouded over and her lips tightened. Then, gravely shaking her head—

“Lady Olifaunt? What do you think I could tell you about her? You know her, and that she is young, beautiful and rich—”

For a moment Louis hesitated; then, with eyes fixed on Mademoiselle Lereboulley—

“What is there between her and your father?” he asked.

“Ah! Is that what is troubling you?”

“Yes. I have questioned Thauziat and he would give me no reply. It is quite plain that you detest Diana, and that she is frightened of you. Why your hatred, and why her fear?”

Emilie’s eyes looked still darker beneath her contracted eyebrows, but she answered in a jesting tone,

“We certainly do not adore one another, and if you want to know all, it is my belief that Diana is a natural child that my father had while he was in England.”

Louis started.

“You are laughing at me! He did not know her two years ago.”

“He found her again by chance. Thauziat put him on her track—the workings of Providence are mysterious, you know.”

“Oh! It is not possible!”

“Then what should she be, if not his daughter?” exclaimed Emilie, regaining all her former gaiety. “His mistress? You surely did not imagine I was going to tell you I suspected my father of misbehaving himself? How about our honourable Sir James if that were so? And how about myself, who receive the divine Diana—what should I be, if she were a fast woman? No, no! Her conduct is irreproachable, only she is English, and foreigners are

eccentric, that is all. And, in conclusion, let me give you some good advice—don't make love to her. You would only get yourself into trouble with Sir James, and he is a first-rate shot."

Then as Louis shrugged his shoulders in calm disdain—

"And, above all, you would displease papa, which would be an infinitely more serious affair."

"Then he would have some reasons for being displeased?"

"He would have those of which I have told you. Content yourself with them and think them good, for want of others. Then you will take me this evening?"

"Since you insist. But it will be at your own risk."

"Naturally. Besides papa will be there, and when I feel bored I will surprise him by making myself known to him."

"What a pleasure there is in store for him, then! Where shall I call for you?"

"At the house door, at midnight. Is that arranged?"

"Yes."

At this moment Madame Hérault rose from the card-table, and, turning to the two young people, said disconsolately—

"Well, what do you think of this? Clément's luck is tremendous, and I have lost two hundred and fifty francs!"

"Oh, indeed!" cried Emilie, seating herself in the chair the old lady had just vacated. "You just wait a minute. I will get back your money from him, accompanied by a little of his own also."

She shuffled the cards, and looking Thauziat in the face—

"Come, cut," she said, "and don't let us have too many sixties by queens. It will be ostentatious on your part."

Clément raised his handsome head and smiled.

"And you try not to cheat," he said.

"If I didn't cheat with you, how should I manage to win?"

"Thank you."

And reaching across the table, he took Mademoiselle Lereboulley's slender, nervous hand, and dropped a kiss upon the rosy nails. Emilie made not the least resistance. Her nostrils dilated slightly, her eyes shone as though she had experienced a sudden agitation, then she said in her sarcastic voice—

"You adore that which hurts you? That is right."

And aided by Louis' advice, she commenced the game.

In her arm-chair by the side of the fire sat old Madame Hérault, drowsily dreaming. The young girl who bore the name of the place where she was born was in her thoughts, and insensibly she began to review her past life. One by one the years of her youth passed before her eyes—years when she had been poor, and yet so happy that the memory of them brought a smile to her lips—and, entranced by the vision which caused her in one moment to live over again the whole of her life, the grandmother gave herself up to its charm and entirely forgot her present surroundings.

CHAPTER II.

ON the high-road from Rouen to Dieppe, between Longueville and Saint-Aubin, lie the hundred or so white houses, with thatched and tiled roofs, and clustering orchards, which form the little village called Graville, while on the top of a hill, covered with beeches whose dark leaves tremble in the sea-breeze, can be seen the brick turrets of the château surmounting the house which is built in the Renaissance style, and adorned by a monumental porch, from which a double flight of steps leads down to a terrace bordered by old lilac-trees and broad flower-beds.

Near the château gate is a marble tablet with an inscription to commemorate the fact that it was at Graville Henri IV. passed the night after the battle of Arques. It was also at Graville, in a drawing-room on the ground floor, so says tradition, that the victorious king seated himself at a table of Italian marqueterie, ever since carefully preserved, and wrote the celebrated note: "You can hang yourself, my good Crillon. We were victorious at Arques, and you were not there."

A few hundred yards from the park walls, on the banks of the river Scie, and hidden by a screen of poplars, stands a factory, with damp, smoke-blackened walls, called Le Glandier. There copper is rolled out ready for the keels of ships, boilers for steamers are constructed, and cylinders cast. Le Glandier is an appendage of the Graville estate.

In 1814 Count Bernard resigned the post he had held in the Danish navy all through the time of the Revolution and the Empire, and then founded a metal workshop to give employment to the brave followers who had shared his exile. In 1826 Monsieur de Graville, well posted up in the discoveries of science and foreseeing the change the employment of steam would cause in ship-building, added the construction of boilers to the rolling-out of copper, and gradually became in a position to furnish the Havre ship-builders with all the machinery they required.

The foreman of the works was then a tall, broad-shouldered man of thirty, named Hérault. Hérault was exceedingly intelligent, but extremely illiterate; he could not read and had never felt the necessity of learning, but he had taught himself drawing with no aid but his own diligence, his knowledge of machinery showing him the advantage of being a good draughtsman, and he had invented an automatic valve which had brought important orders to his master. Strong and well-built, he was the favourite of all the girls in Graville; and amongst his conquests he could count that of old Gandon's daughter, to whose inn he went every Sunday, for he never drank in the week, and had the character of being a very steady man. Fifine, as Mademoiselle Joséphine was familiarly called, fell in love with Hérault, who in return paid her great attention, and they were often to be met in the evening walking together on the Offranville road.

The result of this amorous intimacy was an accident, at which old Gandon was all the more enraged when he found Hérault—in his calm, peasant selfishness—was not in the least disposed to make reparation for his fault. He did not

want to shackle himself with a wife he would have to drag with him everywhere like a cumbersome burden. In his ambitious dreams, the foreman had always fancied himself at Hâvre, and perhaps one day at Paris, both fertile fields where ideas flourish and bear fruit exceedingly, and for ten years he had stinted himself to save up a little capital with which he might commence business, and from workman rise to master in his turn. Therefore he took no notice of Fifine's entreaties, and to avoid her father's anger simply ceased to go to the inn.

"What a fool that Hérault must be not to marry old Gandon's daughter and the inn too at the same time!" said all the young men of the village. "A man would be very happy there, and he'd have board and lodging to the end of his days."

They could not guess their companion's plans; he aimed too high for their eyesight to reach.

And so, in his future's interests, Hérault firmly renounced all the pleasures of the present. No more irregular affections, no more Sunday drinking bouts. He shut himself up alone in his room and passed his evenings in drawing—he was on the point of making a new discovery. Still, chance, in which he had placed all his confidence, forced on him the modification of his existence he had so violently refused, and made his marriage with Gandon's daughter his first stepping-stone to fortune.

Madame de Graville, the wife of Count Bernard and at this time a young woman of twenty-five, had a delicate, weakly son with whom Fifine used to play for hours, when she went to the château to do a day's sewing. But, in her despair and shame when she found herself jilted by Hérault and

the result of her intimacy with him becoming daily more apparent, the poor girl ceased to work at Madame de Graville's, and the little boy, left with no playfellow, fretted at her absence. The countess made inquiry, found out the truth, and, aware that Hérault worked at the factory, undertook to bring him to a sense of duty. Certainly, Madame de Graville was eloquent, but above all she was rich, and the dowry she offered of three thousand francs made the balance between the foreman's love and ambition so exact, that, the following month, Hérault and Mademoiselle Gandon were married by the mayor of Saint-Aubin.

At the end of a year, the possessor of six thousand francs, the husband of an active and devoted wife, and the father of a big boy that had been christened Pierre, Hérault left Graville and went to Hâvre to make practical experiments with a safety-valve he had invented, and which was to vastly improve marine steam-engines.

The shrewd, hard-working peasant must have received at his birth the mark on the forehead which distinguishes those who are destined to succeed in everything they undertake, for ten years later he had settled at Paris and become the owner of a vast factory at Saint-Denis.

The revolution of 1848, which ruined so many, enriched Hérault still more. Taking advantage of the tremendous fall of stocks, he placed all the money at his command in public securities; then in 1852, after the Coup d'Etat, he realised his capital and employed it in the acquirement of property in the Champs-Élysées, for this hard-headed workman guessed, with a wonderful intuition of the luxurious habits of the Parisian upper middle-class, that the new *régime* would encourage the building of

palatial mansions, and that favourable sites would soon become worth ten times their present value. While he was busily employed dividing into lots the acres of ground he had bought in the neighbourhood of the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, and which he afterwards sold for a thousand francs a yard, the mansion in the Faubourg Poissonnière came into the market, and falling to Hérault as the highest bidder, he went there to reside with his wife and son, who was by this time twenty-six years old.

As long as the Empire lasted did the two men toil. The elder Hérault lived but for his trade and brought it to the highest pitch of perfection. His immense workshops, where eighteen hundred men worked amidst an infernal noise, formed one of the curiosities of Saint-Denis, and at the Exhibition of 1867 the erstwhile foreman was made president of the section of machinery, and, afterwards, an officer of the Legion of Honour.

Finding that he had climbed so high by his activity and intelligence, the ambition of assisting in the government of his country entered Hérault's head. Surely it would be but a child's game to this man to cause himself to be elected deputy for Saint-Denis, for could he not speak their own tongue to the metal-workers as they stood red with the dust of the copper they had been filing? It would be enough for him to manifest the desire for his success to be assured, and then who knows? Perhaps the ministry of the State works awaited him, and then he would bring about so many necessary reforms, he would introduce so many practical regulations. He might be the founder of a wholesome socialism (a germ of which he suspected lay

in the mind of the imperial ruler) which would assure an era of work to the people, fraught with happiness and safety.

The sudden outbreak of war shattered all these cherished plans, and Hérault, who firmly believed in the supremacy of France, died from the shock the German invasion caused him. Though he was hard-headed enough, he could not bear the sight of his workshops converted into miniature fortresses, and his offices into military hospitals. The big furnaces of the factory standing empty and unused, and the clouds of white smoke which hung over the Fort de Briche formed a spectacle for which he was totally unprepared, and before Paris had capitulated the worthy man had died, leaving his fortune to his widow and his trade to his son.

Pierre Hérault was a man over forty when the government of the factory fell into his hands. He had worked under the harsh "master," as he generally called his father, as a clerk, and had been brought up unaccustomed to the slightest luxury, for even when he was worth millions old Hérault had made no change in his manner of life. To tell the truth, he did not feel any necessity for doing so; he had no wants and he only pursued fortune so eagerly in obedience to his innate passion of acquisitiveness. He and his wife Joséphine rose at five o'clock in summer and six in winter and went to bed very soon after sunset, and the only pleasure allowed the family was when they took a box at the theatre twice a year—on the "master's" birthday and at Easter—and went to see the piece which happened to be the greatest success.

When in 1860 Pierre Hérault married the daughter of a rich vermicelli-maker, his father gave him no money with

which to keep his wife, but insisted on his living on the second floor of the mansion in the Faubourg Poissonnière. The existence of this family living in the vast house with four servants was the meanest it is possible to imagine. Young and old Madame Hérault had each her own maid, but there was only one cook to prepare the meals which both households took together—not in the splendid dining-room decorated with exquisite paintings representing mythological scenes, but in a little room adjoining the kitchen, which had been used in the time of the former masters as an office where the steward made up his accounts and saw the tradespeople. The only man-servant was the coachman, whose duty it was, after having brought back the Héraults from Saint-Denis, and before grooming his horse or washing the carriage, to wait at dinner.

This life, to which Pierre Hérault had been accustomed from childhood, had seemed very dull and miserable to his young wife. Highly educated and with ideas on life and society which naturally could not be those of her husband's parents, she had found an echo to her own complaints in Pierre's heart, for he also, better educated than his father, and conscious of the advantages of a social life, disliked the existence imposed upon him. Making up the books himself each year, and therefore aware of the fortune belonging to the family, he blamed his father's parsimony without daring to protest against it. The free disposal of his own allowance and of the income from his wife's dowry had permitted him to indulge in some amusements, but he was always in fear of the "master's" reprimands, and the monotonous years rolled on, bringing with them no fresh emotions, no new incidents, but never-ceasing work which seemed

objectless, since it was forbidden to enjoy this wealth which was the fruit of it, and which accumulated daily.

Madame Hérault, the mother, had found an ingenious and not very costly way of employing her time—she gave herself up to a passion for flowers. Her husband had a hot-house built for her at the bottom of the garden, facing the south, and there she cultivated, with the care and patience of a Dutch amateur, orchids of the rarest and most beautiful kinds. Her peasant's nature would not allow her to sacrifice only to pleasure, so she trained vines over the wall at the end of the hot-house, which, in July, bore magnificent bunches of grapes. These grapes were placed triumphantly before Monsieur Hérault after dinner and made him forgive his wife's modest outlay, for in the eyes of the hard-working man, the utilitarian side of the pastime atoned for that which was frivolous.

Young Madame Hérault, who had no taste for horticulture, consoled herself by devoting herself to her child, whom she dressed like a young prince. She could never find a dress too handsomely embroidered, a hat trimmed with lace too precious for little Louis, the dauphin of this house of Hérault-Gandon whose signature was esteemed before all others at the bank, and yet who certainly did not spend more than fifty thousand francs a year in a mansion which had witnessed the fêtes of the Regency.

The young wife bore with her present life, cheered by the thought of the splendour awaiting her in the future. Too good to wish for the death of her tyrannical father-in-law, she still knew that he was not immortal, and she was sure that, after the time of mourning, everything in the ways of the family would be altered. But fate had not reserved even

this tardy enjoyment for her, and she died eighteen months before old Hérault, leaving her husband with a six-year-old son to bring up.

Fortunately there was old Madame Hérault, who unhesitatingly divided herself between her flowers and her grandson—a still more frail and tender flower than any she had cherished hitherto. He was delicate, this off-shoot of a race of labourers. Pierre was not so strong and vigorous as old Hérault had been, and little Louis was still less robust than his father ; it seemed as though the descendants were getting weaker as well as more refined than the original stock.

A grandmother's affection for her grandchildren is generally more indulgent and more passionate than is her love for even her own children. It seems as though old people are softened and improved by time as is a generous wine. Perhaps, too, the end of life, which they know to be imminent, causes them to seize all the enjoyment they still can find in their affection, and their kisses are the more affectionate because they may be the last.

Old Madame Hérault had for her grandson an intense and exclusive affection, which would have made her place the world at the feet of this blue-eyed, golden-haired boy if she could, while she manifested an extraordinary indifference towards her own son. She lived with him in complete harmony, assenting to everything he proposed (for the former slave had quickly transformed himself into master), but with every thought, care, and dream centred in the child.

Besides, this big fellow of forty-five no longer needed his mother. In a day he had become "Hérault-Gandon,"

and now reigned in his father's stead; he was the head—it was his place to command. There was no need to tell him that, and in a very short time the whole appearance of the house was changed. Parsimonious old Hérault had not been in his grave six months before the mansion was invaded by armies of workmen, who commenced to restore it to the condition in which it had been left by La Grimonière, in the time when nymphs of the opera ran lightly under the shady trees, stopping to rest in the arbours with Canillacs or La Fares as their companions.

The shepherds and shepherdesses over the doors, cleaned and revarnished, looked out once more from their frames. The gilding of the drawing-room, tarnished by a century's neglect, reappeared under the painter's sponge, and in taking off the paper in the billiard-room some marvellous tapestry, over which the meaner printed hanging had been placed, was brought to light, while old carved arm-chairs were rescued from the garrets to which they had been scornfully relegated to make room for the showy mahogany and gilded bronze of the First Empire.

Hérault was fortunate enough to secure the services of an upholsterer possessed of good taste who provided furniture worthy of the house, so there were none of the loud-coloured curtains and heavy Genoa velvets, such as disfigured houses under the Second Empire, in the drawing-room, but old brocaded silk was used to cover the chairs and drape the windows. The principal staircase was adorned with four panels of tapestry by Lebrun, representing the victories of Alexander, and the wrought-iron balustrade, which had become blackened by time, was skilfully re-gilded. In a few months the mansion had an aspect of

luxury in accordance with the wealth of its occupants. The number of servants was doubled; four horses imparted a little animation to the stables, and in the coach-houses stood elegant carriages. The expenses of the household were increased threefold the first year, but yet they did not absorb a quarter of the revenues.

Hérault, who had commenced to repair the mansion in fear and trembling, and had said to himself as he put the household on a different footing, "Well, at any rate, I can see how we get on," found with joy that his "follies" were in truth very reasonable, and that instead of stopping at what he had already accomplished, he could make still more improvements.

There seemed no greater pleasure possible to this man, until then deprived of every luxury, than to indulge himself in every refinement; and gradually he turned into the easy paths of life. He no longer rose at dawn, as his father had accustomed him to do, for he now belonged to a club, and, when he had sat up late at night, the temptation to stay in bed the next morning was irresistible. A manager and three engineers now performed the duties at the factory that his father and he had for so many years so well fulfilled, and thus he had plenty of leisure to enjoy life.

After a year of celibacy he made the acquaintance at the sea-side of a widow, young, elegant and much sought after, who attracted him to her house and took upon herself the completion of his fashionable education, and in her drawing-room he met a circle of men and women whose one aim in life was pleasure. Had he had a little experience he would have seen at once, that if

the men were undoubtedly gentlemen, the women were, for the most part, of questionable virtue and obscure origin ; but as it was, he only perceived the pleasure he derived from their society, and contributed largely to the costly luxury of her who had provided him with so much amusement.

He was spending more and making less money than before, for in business nothing can replace the master's eye, but he faithfully conformed to the rules of the modern philosophers who have decided that, as he does not know what awaits him after death, man ought, if he is wise, to commence by making life as pleasant as possible. This airy and dissipated materialism would have made old Hérault, who considered all useless expense extravagance, shudder, but the founder of the fortune was peacefully sleeping in the family vault, while his son scattered the money.

However Pierre Hérault was not a spendthrift, and if he did not continue his father's work, at any rate he did not destroy what had been already accomplished. He was not becoming richer, but neither was he ruining himself ; he simply spent his income, and while he appeared to be squandering everything, in reality was merely living up to his means.

This, however, was not the line of conduct followed in later years by Louis, who, with the taste for every luxury which he had had since a child, managed to reach the heights of extravagance which his father had never attained.

From a boy, it was apparent that he had a marked preference for everything which costs money, and a profound disdain for all that makes it. When he was eighteen,

it was impossible to make him pass one examination, although he had undoubted abilities, and it had needed interest to permit him to serve as a volunteer. When old Madame Hérault witnessed the departure of this slight, fair, rosy-cheeked boy, who looked like a girl and who would be transformed into a hussar within four-and-twenty hours, the tears she shed were even more bitter than those with which she had mourned her husband, and she wandered about the great house, which seemed empty to her without the presence of her darling boy, like a soul in torment, indifferent even to her flowers, and never bestowing one glance upon her precious orchids. At the end of a week, unable to hold out any longer, she went to Evreux, where her grandson's regiment was stationed, and put up at the inn.

But, although she was not exacting, she found it so uncomfortable there that she began to look for a house where she could live in comfort during the twelve months which the "martyrdom," as she called it, of her dear child, would last. Now, the presence of his grandmother was not at all in accordance with the ideas of the "dear child," who had found very merry society in the regiment. These young hussars, volunteers for a year, did not give way to melancholy, and ten or twelve of them had turned a suburban cottage into a sort of club, where they passed their time very agreeably in smoking, eating, drinking, playing, and the rest of it. A few pretty girls, caught in the town by these ensnarers who made every promise for the future, helped them to bear the burden of life, and never had the presence of a grandmother seemed less necessary than did Madame Hérault's appear to Louis.

His first thought was to send her back to Paris, but you can't so easily get rid of people who love you, and in vain did the hussar explain to the excellent woman that he was in perfect health, that everything was going on as well as possible and that he didn't want her in the least—he could not persuade her that she did not want him. Then he too began to look for a house for the good lady, and as he did not wish her too near the town, he discovered a charming château at Boissise-le-Roy, situated on the banks of the Eure, between the forests of Pacy and Breteuil, to which it was united by thinly planted woods. The owner consented to let the house for a twelvemonth, with the understanding that at the end of that time Madame Hérault would buy it if it suited her. Though there was no need for any such stratagems, for he had only to say, “I wish so and so,” for his grandmother to at once fall in with his plans, the artful hussar pointed out that there were splendid hot-houses in the château grounds, and the tears sprang to Madame Hérault's eyes, as she thought, “He has considered my whims and pleasures,” though, in point of fact, this delightful egotist had only considered his own. Boissise stood on a hill a few miles from Evreux, which could be seen from the château windows. Louis pointed out to his grandmother the arrow on the top of the cathedral, and said—

“You can see the roof of the barracks from here with an opera-glass, and we shall be together and yet you will be in the country. At any time you can reach the town in three-quarters of an hour, with good horses, and on Sundays I will come over to see you with some of my friends.”

So Madame Hérault took Boissise, brought her coachman,

carriages, and servants from Paris, with the furniture that was needed for the somewhat barely-furnished château, and in the end was very comfortable there. She was delighted with the hot-houses, as much because her old passion for flowers had revived as because Louis had suggested them as an occupation for her leisure time. As for Louis himself, he shortened as much as possible his drill, thanks to the connivance of the non-commissioned officers, upon whom he showered cigars and money, and passed his days in playing poker and baccarat for high stakes and in merry little dinners at the "Café de Paris."

There was a good deal of game at Boissise, and when August came, Pierre Hérault, who for six months had turned a deaf ear to all the invitations of his mother, who was now again pressing him to pay her a visit, determined to go and see her. He thought the place charming, and, seized by a sudden caprice for the woods and fields, decided to pass the autumn there—after all, Evreux was only two hours from Paris, and it was not like shutting oneself off from mankind to stay at Boissise. Once there he lived in great style, and caused a tremendous sensation in the quiet provincial town. He had already made the acquaintance of some of the officers at his club, and, through them, soon knew all the others who were then at Evreux, and all day long Boissise resounded with the clank of spurred boots.

But the feminine element was lacking, until a few invitations, skilfully distributed among the surrounding châteaux, attracted the wives and daughters of the *châtelains*, and then the Boissise receptions began to offer a harmonious mixture of the sexes.

The grandmother pleased by her frank good-nature, the

son by his simplicity. As for the grandson, he was much oftener to be found at the château than at the barracks, although he felt somewhat embarrassed amidst the superior officers notwithstanding they were his father's guests, for the awe which has been established by long months of obedience is not decreased by a few hours of familiar intercourse.

Pierre Hérault, who had learnt to ride since he had entered society, would have liked to hunt. The forest was full of deer, and the surrounding country was not a very stiff one, but, besides the time of year being hardly suitable to stag-hunting, there were no hounds, so he had to be contented with sundry paper-chases, which the hussar officers undertook to make exceptionally exciting.

Louis, who was a splendid horseman, took care to keep at a distance from his officers on these occasions, though it would have been easy for him to win, thanks to his father's thoroughbreds. But he did not want to offend those who could be severe at Evreux, charming as they were at Boissise, so he started with everyone else, dressed in his simple soldier's uniform for fear of eclipsing the smallest sub-lieutenant by the elegance of his attire, and, after a five minutes gallop, would suddenly turn into a side path and lose himself in the wood, leaving the others to follow the track of the paper.

A long time he would ride under the cool, leafy dome, while his horse's hoofs sank deep into the thick moss, listening abstractedly to the strident cries of the jays as they flew from tree to tree and to the far away, melancholy call of the cuckoo. When he reached the end of the wood he dismounted, threw himself down on the bank of some

ditch, and lay still in the drowsy heat of the summer sun, watching the broad undulations of the yellow corn as it swayed in the breeze. Every now and then he heard the echo of the distant horn, and the profound peacefulness around him gave him a sense of exquisite rest after the noisy pleasures of his ordinary life.

He did not notice the flight of time as he lay dreaming and thinking that perhaps there might be other pleasures in this world besides suppers, and love that has a market value, and card parties. His soft, tender, somewhat weak nature could have been easily turned to good. It only needed a firm, constant influence to make of this lad of twenty, who was already being led astray by harmful society, a good and upright man, instead of the rake, useless to others and dangerous to himself, that he promised to become. But his grandmother had not sufficient moral authority to exercise this influence, and his father was too intent on making up for his forty years of self-denial to consistently direct any existence but his own.

One day there had been a picnic near the ruins of an old abbey, well-known to archæologists by the name of Saint Wulfrand, and about four o'clock Louis was walking his horse home towards Boissise. The whole day his thoughts had been occupied about a request for a large sum of money he was forced to make to his family by his losses at cards, and, after hovering for some time about his father, he had determined to confide his embarrassment to Madame Hérault. He was going home with this intention, thinking, as he smoked his cigar, of how his time of serving would be up in two months, and of the gay life he could then lead in Paris, when, in passing a clearing in the forest,

he heard a shout in a clear, treble voice. He stopped and saw someone standing by a carriage about two hundred yards off, beckoning to him. Turning into the path, which was full of deep ruts made by the wood-cutters' carts, in a few seconds he had reached the boy who needed his assistance.

The latter was a fair, sickly-looking lad of about fourteen, with stooping shoulders, dressed in a cloth blouse, knickerbockers gathered into leather gaiters below the knee, and a little grey felt hat. The pony-chaise he had so imprudently driven into this mire had lost one of its wheels and was lying on its side in the mud. The boy had done his utmost to try and raise it, until he had found that the task was beyond his strength, and he had just commenced to unharness the pony, when Louis appeared on the scene of the catastrophe.

"Hi, soldier, lend me a hand," he cried imperiously. "I can't get my carriage up, or my horse out of the shafts either."

"You are going the wrong way about it, my boy," said Louis, jumping off his horse.

The lad glanced at the hussar rather contemptuously, then shrugged his shoulders, and said :

"Well, we shall see if you will be any cleverer."

"There won't be much difficulty about that," replied Louis, calmly.

He picked up the wheel which was lying in the mud, examined it to see if it were broken, then taking hold of the axle-tree with both hands, pulled the chaise out of the rut. The pony, which was naturally quiet, and was now tired into the bargain, did not move a muscle.

"Now I want something to support the axle," said Louis, and pointing to a heap of wood—

"See, give me two of those bundles."

The boy took up the heavy branches and brought them in his arms, bending under his load. In his efforts his hat fell off, and Louis saw with surprise that his companion's fair hair was drawn up on the top of the head and held there by a woman's comb. He picked up the hat, which had rolled to his feet, and said with a smile and a slight bow :

"I must apologise, mademoiselle. If I had known I was dealing with one of your sex, I should not have addressed you so familiarly."

"Oh, all right! If that fool of a hat had only kept on, you wouldn't have known I was a girl, so let's suppose it hasn't fallen off, and go on with our work."

Louis placed the wheel on the axle-tree, fixed it with one half of the broken pin, and spun it round two or three times to see that it was firm.

"There, it's all right now, and if you will get in I might accompany you until we reach the road."

"But I should not like to take you out of your way."

"It will not be out of my way. I live at Boissise."

"Ah! Then you are young Hérault?"

Louis gazed in surprise at the girl who was treating him with such scant ceremony. She was thin, pale, and slightly misshapen, with a delicate-looking face in which shone two grey eyes sparkling with mischief, and apparently not more than fifteen. She had taken the reins in her thin, transparent hands, and was trying to start her pony, who, well-pleased with his enforced halt, did not seem disposed to move. She held out her whip to Louis :

"I say, hussar, just give the lazy beggar a cut for me."

"I will do better than that," replied the young man, and slipping his left arm through his horse's bridle, he placed his right hand on the light pony chaise, and, pushing with all his strength, soon set it in motion.

They followed the muddy path for some minutes and then came upon a road which cut it at right angles.

"Here we are, safe in port!" cried the young girl gaily. "And now, my deliverer, I must assure you of my sincerest gratitude."

"I have done nothing to deserve it."

"Oh, yes, you have, and you are simply covered with mud. But, there! What would you not go through for beauty's sake!" she continued in tones of bitter sarcasm. "By the way, you have not even asked me who I am. That isn't very polite, you know."

"I am discreet—"

"Or rather you are not very anxious to meet me again. I can quite understand that!"

And she smiled the pitiful smile of a child whose illusions have been already destroyed.

"Well, your discretion will not have served you much. I live about three miles from you, and my name is Emilie. My father is Monsieur Lereboulley, the senator—a very big, very good-natured gentleman, with whom you will always meet a pretty woman."

Louis looked at the girl with questioning eyes.

"Your mother, I suppose?" he said.

Emilie's forehead contracted into a frown, her face suddenly hardened, and she answered in a hoarse, trembling voice:

“ My mother is dead ! ”

Then nodding a farewell, she whipped up her pony and drove off.

For a moment Louis stood gazing after her, puzzled by this odd child in whom sarcasm and sensitiveness were so strangely mingled. But he did not care about analysing the impressions he received, and, giving his horse its head, he soon reached home.

Monsieur Lereboulley was indeed very amiable, as the Héraults proved the next day, when he came to thank Louis for the assistance he had rendered his daughter. Pierre Hérault and the senator took a liking to each other at once—there was a sort of free-masonry of pleasure between them—and in a few weeks they were fast friends.

Lereboulley was a big, stout man of fifty, with a round, clean-shaven face like a priest's, and a strong Normandy accent. For several generations his family had had great influence in the department of Eure, and in the memorable struggle between the father of the present senator, who was Orleanist to the backbone, and the prefect, in the time of the Empire, the Lereboulleys had only been vanquished with an infinite amount of trouble. The department was bought over by a lavish distribution of favours, and the Government candidate had triumphed. But, under the Republic, Lereboulley had regained all his power, and the town of Evreux was his to a man. He had been elected senator, one of his nephews was a deputy, and, as regards the ballot, they were almost masters of the department. Lereboulley, who was a shrewd, far-seeing man in spite of his easy-going manners, was one of those important personages to whom the Bourse is obliged to pay deference.

A governor of the Bank, and formerly of the *Crédit Foncier*, and a director of the *Chemin de Fer du Midi*, his position was exceptional, both from a political and financial point of view.

Left a widower, with a daughter he loved all the more because she had been so difficult to rear, he had not married a second time, although opportunities had not been wanting, for he could never bear the idea of giving a step-mother to his little, delicate Emilie. "If I had other children who were strong and healthy," he thought, "my poor little homely one would be neglected, perhaps regarded with contempt. So there must be no rivals; she shall be the sole ruler in my house." And he had resisted all assaults upon his right hand. But he had made up for it with his left. Gallantry was his darling sin, and, as his daughter had said, he was always to be met with a pretty woman. The house of the widow, who enlivened Pierre Hérault's life, offered, by means of the people he met there, almost unlimited resources to this senatorial butterfly, and the intimacy between the two men became very close. Hérault entered into various financial schemes devised by Lereboulley, and Lereboulley turned Hérault's factories into a company, in which he became one of the largest shareholders.

The children followed their parents' example, and Louis became Emilie's great friend. It was a strong and sincere affection, into which entered no idea of marriage between the handsome youth and the girl so unfavoured by nature. They had been attracted towards one another, she by Louis's good looks and youthful light-heartedness; he, on the other hand, by Emilie's physical deformities and her bitter self-

consciousness, and the very fact of there being so great a contrast between them formed the foundation of an indestructible friendship.

Another great attraction which the Hérault household possessed for Mademoiselle Lereboulley was old Madame Hérault. Deprived as she had hitherto been of all feminine affection, the child at once adopted the old lady and regarded her as her own grandmother, laying aside, for her sake, her odd, boyish ways and becoming a true girl. It was time for her to take a place in the household, for Louis, following his father's example, had taken flight and begun to enjoy life. But how far superior he showed himself in the art of scattering money ! Between Hérault's method of enjoying life and that of his son, there was as much difference as between the speed of an old stage-coach and that of a railway train—the one went quietly over the ground doing its nine miles an hour amidst an honest cloud of dust, the other tears along surrounded by smoke and flame, devouring space with a noise like thunder.

In three years Louis had run through the money left him by his mother, and was just preparing to bestow his signature upon every usurer in Paris when a fit of apoplexy placed him in possession of his father's fortune within five minutes.

On his return from a little party to which he had been with Lereboulley, Hérault had felt a sensation of heaviness and had complained to his servant of a dimness of vision. The next morning he was found dead in his bed.

The morning of the day that the Hérault-Gandon mansion was hung with funereal draperies, and about two hours before the open hearse, with its silver embroideries

and heavy plumes, bore to his last rest the son of the foreman of the Graville Works, a little hand-cart stopped before the gate and two men unloaded the modest furniture it contained upon the pavement.

"What a nuisance it is your coming to-day," said the annoyed doorkeeper to the two men.

"But it's the fifteenth," replied one of them; "and if anyone's in the wrong it's your dead——"

"He was the landlord," interrupted the doorkeeper, sternly.

"That only makes it worse," said the other porter, shrugging his shoulders. "There's no sense in a landlord who chooses quarter-day to kick the bucket."

"Oh, well, get finished quickly before the body is brought out."

And the moving was completed after three journeys up and down the stairs.

About ten o'clock, when the Faubourg was filled by the crowd of relations, friends, and workmen, come to be present at the funeral, a young girl made her way through the groups and looked at the number on the door, as though the black hangings had so changed the house that she did not recognise it. When she found that she had indeed reached her destination, she gave a slight, frightened start, then as she passed near the coffin, covered with wreaths and bouquets of flowers which made the air heavy with their perfume, she bent her knee and uttered a short prayer before she went on.

Thus did Hélène de Graville enter the house at the moment that Pierre Hérault was leaving it for ever.

She did not even know the name of this man whose

birth her grandmother had legitimised by Fifine's marriage, for the countess had soon forgotten her generous deed and those whom it had benefited. Her son had succeeded his father in the management of the factory and the estate, and when he had married his wife had borne him but one child—Hélène. By a turn of fortune's wheel, which is too often seen in this century of feverish activity and merciless struggle for existence, as the workman prospered so did the wealth of the man who had been his master diminish. Le Glandier, in the hands of an incapable manager, absorbed money instead of producing it, and at last, becoming too great an expense, had to be sold. Monsieur de Graville tried to regain his money by speculation, but the outbreak of war dealt a fatal blow to his schemes, and about 1875 the Graville estate, which had been mortgaged to the last acre, was put up for sale and bought at a low price by a Dieppe banker.

Monsieur de Graville, who had powerful friends, was absolved from any further liability, and was given employment in a Government office; but after the downfall of Mac-Mahon, he found himself on the Paris pavement without friends or resources. Maddened by his loss and unable to accustom himself to a life of poverty, he gathered together the little money left him, and embarked for Texas, determined to meet either death or fortune in the Western country which teems with dangers and riches. Death had been more easily found than fortune. Monsieur de Graville never returned, and his widow was compelled to seek work for her living.

Hélène, then a girl of sixteen, showed a wonderful strength of character and a rare courage under these trying

circumstances. Seeing that her mother was rendered helpless by so many misfortunes, she resolutely effected all the reforms their new mode of living would necessitate herself. Their one servant was dismissed, their flat was given up for two rooms in the Rue de Cléry, and the young girl obtained work from a milliner's shop. From morning till night did the clever fingers arrange and sew with astonishing despatch and skill, and this child, born to luxury, became a tireless workwoman beneath whose hands work melted away as though an invisible fairy were aiding by means of a mysterious enchantment.

Her mother did nothing but weep and lament their sad fate, and sometimes Hélène would say, with a resigned smile—

“Our life is certainly not very gay, but to how many must it appear enviable! There are people much worse off than we are, and when we think of them we must esteem ourselves very gently dealt with.”

“It's all very well for you to say that,” moaned her mother. “You have not yet any deeply-rooted habits and customs, but how can I, who have seen prosperity, help grieving? What future is there before me? If you once fell ill, we should sink into utter ruin, for, alas! I am entirely dependent upon you.”

“And that is my greatest pleasure. I am proud of being able to return a little of the care you have bestowed on me. But do not worry yourself. I am strong, and I shall not be ill; besides, nothing is so healthy as frugality and hard work.”

She laughed, then continued gravely, with a shake of her little head—

“And I *will* not be ill.”

“You will not !” repeated her mother, in her discouraged weariness. “Everything would be easy if it only depended on one’s will.”

“And a great deal does depend on the will,” replied H  l  ne, with a slight contraction of the eyebrows which imparted a singular expression of energy to her youthful face. “Only it is not sufficient to will a thing for five minutes and then stop. The will must be constant and continuous.”

“Whence do you obtain so much assurance ?” asked Madame de Graville, a little vexed by this determined optimism.

“I don’t know,” answered H  l  ne, na  vely. “It’s in me, I suppose. But I can’t be otherwise, and I do not wish to be.”

“*I will, and I wish,*” said the widow, sadly. “Even the king says, ‘*We wish.*’”

“Oh, but he has ministers !” cried H  l  ne gaily, as she kissed her mother. “And I have none, so I have more freedom than he has.”

And again she began to ply her needle.

Madame de Graville began teasingly to call her daughter, “Mademoiselle I will,” but her child’s strength of character was not without its influence upon her. She felt that H  l  ne was morally her superior, and, in the confidence of weakness, she abandoned her life to her government. She had no cause to repent doing so. In two years their position was so far improved that they were no longer actually pinched by poverty. The firms for which H  l  ne worked had increased her pay, and had often offered her

the position of forewoman at their shops, but the young girl did not like the idea of being so little above a servant. Besides, she would have had to leave her mother alone all day, and Madame de Graville was not in a fit state, either morally or physically, to be left by herself. Her weak health demanded H  l  ne's constant attention, and the young girl remained at home to work.

As long as daylight lasted, she sat working by the window, listening to the hum of the busy street. Then, as evening closed in, she lighted her lamp and continued her task in the tiny room which served as dining-room. Her mother sat dozing over the *feuilleton* in the day's paper, and at eleven o'clock drowsily allowed herself to be undressed and put to bed, after which H  l  ne sat beside her and read her off to sleep.

"We have changed our parts," Madame de Graville would say when she was in a good humour. "You are the mother now, and I am only your old baby."

She was indeed a child, to whose whims both present and future had to give way. If H  l  ne had been perfectly free, if, instead of being fettered, she had been helped onward, she would probably have made her fortune in business. Her quiet activity, her smiling confidence won everybody's sympathy, and in her presence one felt at once that she was no ordinary girl.

With her pretty face she did not want for admirers, and, amidst the dishonourable proposals she had received, one straightforward and serious offer had been made her. The head of a large mourning warehouse—*A l'Immortelle*—had wished to make her his wife. He was a man of forty, not very good-looking, but clever and immensely rich. But

Hélène, in spite of the advice of her mother, who saw that her daughter's marriage would mean an easy and assured future for them both, refused to marry him ; she preferred to remain as she was rather than give her hand to a man she could not love. Her mother was terribly grieved at her decision, for she liked the owner of *L'Immortelle*.

"You always like to obey your own fancies," she said to Hélène, "and with this man you could satisfy every caprice. He would be your slave."

"And what good would that be to me, if I do not like him ? Besides there is no pleasure to me in having my own way, unless it benefits those I love."

Three peaceful, uneventful years passed by, each day, like the other, filled with work and made glad by affection. Then a catastrophe came to break the happy monotony. Madame de Graville died suddenly from the rupture of an aneurism, and, without warning, without preparation, Hélène found herself completely alone in the world. For a week the brave girl felt crushed, and her reason swayed. Her father had died far away from her, and, however deeply she had felt his loss, the blow had not been so direct as the one under which she was now bowed down. Her mother, with whom she had lived from her birth, without one absence coming to break their tender intercourse, had been suddenly taken away from her ; every tie which had attached the loving daughter to her parent had been roughly broken, and her physical pain was intense. All at once she saw her future before her like a black and gaping chasm, which made her giddy as she gazed, and she stayed alone in her room, weeping.

But this utter abandonment could not last long, and

when the poor girl again came in full possession of her senses, she could not bear the thought of staying in these rooms, where, every hour of the day, she expected to see her mother, and thus it came to pass that she entered the house in the Faubourg Poissonnière the very day that Louis followed his father to the grave.

Hélène's window looked on to the courtyard, and every day she saw the young fellow pass in or out, dressed in black like herself. When two people happen to meet who have the same sorrow or the same joy, there is generally a secret sympathy between them, and the fact of this rich young man being oppressed by the weight of a similar affliction to her own drew Hélène's pitying attention towards him. It was the first time in her life she had taken so much interest in a man.

During the six months which immediately followed Monsieur Hérault's death, Louis led a more regular life and seemed thoroughly reformed. He lived with his grandmother, lunched with her every morning, then went to his father's office at Saint-Denis to attend to the business of the factory, returned home to dinner, and passed the evening with Madame Hérault, with whom he generally found Emilie Lereboulley who had redoubled her care and attention for her old friend.

Every morning and evening did Hélène see Louis from her window. At first she did not even know his name, for the Héraults' agent had let her the room, and it was only by chance she learnt it from old Anselme, who informed her, at the same time, that the young man was very rich, and not very steady.

The distance between the little work-girl and young

Hérault was so great that Hélène felt there could be no danger in letting her thoughts turn so frequently to this handsome man, whose conduct, according to the doorkeeper, was far from being all that might be desired. But the porter must have exaggerated tremendously, for Louis's behaviour was exemplary. He went out at the same time every morning and returned at the same hour every evening as regularly as clock-work, always with that sweet, sad air about him which he had had from a boy, and which all through his life won him sympathy and indulgence, in spite of his misdoings.

During the first months of sorrow and regret, he did sincerely mean to reform and to become as steady as he had been gay. He was now twenty-six; had he not had enough amusement, and could he not now devote himself to business as he had hitherto devoted himself to pleasure? Was it not an interesting task to direct the vast Saint-Denis factory, where two thousand men worked amidst the noise and din? Was he not concerned in ten of Lereboulley's transactions, and would he not find his time, if he chose, entirely taken up by the care of the great interests he had to develop? Besides he had good business capacities and he knew he could perform his task well.

His managers and foremen were delighted at his praiseworthy zeal. They thought they were again to have a master at their head, and their eagerness to help him in the execution of his schemes encouraged Louis and sustained his good resolutions a little longer than if he had been left entirely to himself. But at the end of six months, tired of his self-imposed retreat, and weary of work, Louis made his reappearance at his club. The demonstrations of joy with

which he was greeted made his re-entry into the world the more pleasant; and pulled in opposite directions by duty and by pleasure, he gave way to that which seemed the more agreeable.

From that day Madame Hérault dined alone with Emilie Lereboulley almost every evening, and it was seldom the young work-girl saw Louis at the same time two consecutive days. The first time he did not return to dinner she forgot to dine herself. With her work fallen on her knees, she stayed at the window listening for the firm step which she always recognised as it passed through the gate and which announced Louis's return, but gradually night drew on, lights gleamed from the windows of the Hôtel Hérault, Emilie's carriage drove up to the door, and the servants began to busy about dinner. The clock of the church Saint-Eugène struck eight, and with a tight feeling around her heart, Hélène said to herself: "He is not coming home." Then her bosom heaved with a sigh, and she went into her bedroom feeling as sad as if she had just lost a friend.

CHAPTER III.

COUNT WORÉSEFF'S ball justified every expectation. In the hall of the mansion in the Champs-Élysées, which was lighted by electric lamps till it looked like a fairy palace, was a pleasure-seeking, animated throng, moving in an odorous atmosphere composed of the scent of flowers and the perfumes exhaled by beautiful women. Surrounded by a triple circle of onlookers, the dancers were valseing to the irresistible strains of an orchestra which was hidden by a screen of foliage, while from the balcony which runs all round the first storey leant more spectators, watching the picturesque groups formed by the intermixture of the men's black and red coats, and the bright-coloured dominos of the women.

Above the sound of the instruments rose now and again a murmur of voices, vibrating as the fluttering of wings; pearly bursts of laughter resounded like a joyous flourish of trumpets, and up the great carved wood staircase, decorated with panels painted by Baudry, flowed the curious crowd, eager to see the count's luxurious home.

Every room in the mansion was thrown open, from the Renaissance vestibule with its walls of Florentine mosaic, to the Louis XV. bedroom, whose luminous ceiling has gained for itself celebrity in gallant society—the guests could go where they liked.

“You must consider this as your home for this night,”

had said the wealthy Russian noble to his friends, and, with the hospitable pomp of an Eastern satrap, he had placed all the marvels he possessed at their disposal, and was now, in his own house, only the guest of the people who had asked him to give this fête. He had united all the illustrious, charming and agreeable people in Paris, with but one exception—he had proscribed the Duc de Bligny who had eloped with his wife, two years ago.

“And,” said the count, “it is not so much because he has deprived me of the society of the countess, as because in the duel which resulted, he placed a ball in my thigh which will make me limp for the rest of my days. A wife can always be replaced, but a leg, never.”

All the large clubs were represented by their best known members, and a few velvet masks which had been taken off, on account of the heat, disclosed to view, beneath the lace of the hoods, the pretty faces of the most charming actresses. The Press was represented by a dozen journalists chosen from amongst those who have both talent and conscience. Leaning against a marble column, the chief of contemporary actors—recognisable by his tall figure, his large forehead, over which fell the rebellious locks of hair, and the long grey moustache which shaded a sarcastic mouth—was listening with a smile on his lips, to two young women who were requesting a consultation on an embarrassing question of conscience, and a little farther on, thin and pale, with his Napoleonic profile, the only author who has been able to win fame and success with paradoxical writings was showering the riches of his mind upon a circle of hearers, his wit and epigrams flowing forth, sparkling as a stream of precious stones.

The man on whom has fallen the mantle of the Flemish masters, as little in stature as his talent is great, was stroking his long, flowing beard as he listened to the celebrated musician Vignot, who, with an air of inspiration, and his head, so like one of the apostles, held perfectly erect, was discussing painting and corroborating the tales that were told of his knowledge being universal. A young opera dancer, whose fame, carefully fostered by a banker, a patron of the arts, is commencing to equal that of the brightest stars, was hanging on the arm of the boyish manager of the Comédie Française, whom she was flattering as if she aspired to a place in his company. He was smiling as he teasingly praised Italian choregraphy, and well did he deserve to have his fingers rapped with his fair companion's fan as he extolled Cornalba to the skies. The Prince de Cravan—whose word on any question of fashion or elegance was law—was walking with a closely masked domino, shaking his grey head with a laugh, when anyone asked: "Who is she?" "Introduce her to me," had said a lady friend of his, and he had looked shocked and replied in a whisper: "Impossible! She is Grille d'Egout!"

There were indeed guests of all kinds at this discreet ball, where, thanks to their masks, duchesses and *demi-mondaines* could meet and elbow one another. Only the gentlemen's cards had been demanded as they entered, the ladies' incognito being scrupulously respected, and Woréseff could conscientiously say that he did not know in the least who was at his house and who was not, that evening. It was just this mixture of vice and virtue, of the oldest nobility and women of the lowest birth, this putting next to each

other pell-mell all these people separated under ordinary circumstances by the insurmountable barriers of social laws, which had excited so much interest and curiosity.

Lereboulley had seated himself at a card-table in a little Eastern drawing-room, decorated with suits of armour, and had begun to play poker with Sir James Olifaunt, Bramberg and Sélim Nuño. The beautiful Diana had taken Clément de Thauziat's arm and started on a tour of the rooms, and the senator, easy in the knowledge that she was accompanied by this redoubtable ensurer of respect, prepared to win some of the money of his associates in the Foreign Bank. He had been there about half an hour, nothing had happened to disturb him and on his priest-like countenance there was an expression of utter satisfaction, when a couple entered the room and came over to the table. The woman was small and slight and wore a pale blue satin domino trimmed with exquisite valenciennes lace ; her cavalier was Louis Hérault.

The senator raised his eyes, and recognising the young man :

"Ah ! You are already in possession," he said with a meaning glance. "You are never behindhand."

Louis looked at Lereboulley and replied with an easy smile :

"If I have this young person on my arm, my dear fellow, it is simply to render you a service."

"Do I know her then ?"

"As if you didn't know all the women !"

"Let's see who this one is—"

And the big man rose and left his cards. He was about to raise the lace flounce of the mask when the domino

took him by the shoulders and gave him a kiss on each cheek.

“Ah, ah!” exclaimed Louis, gaily. “If that doesn’t mean affection, I don’t know what does.”

After the salute the domino sprang back with a strident burst of laughter which brought a frown to Lereboulley’s brow, and, taking her companion’s arm again, passed quickly and lightly into the next room.

“I could have sworn it was that mad Emilie,” murmured the senator, as he gazed after the girl. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he resumed his seat at the table and continued his game.

It was indeed Emilie, who for the last hour had been going from group to group with her friend, uttering a mocking phrase here, a pleasant word there, and liberally dispensing the treasures of her wit to all and sundry. Already she had found herself surrounded by a curious group anxious to hear the answers she was making to one of the cleverest literary men of the day. In a disguised voice she mocked and rallied with charming ease. There was nothing violent or ill-bred about her repartee, it was simply an elegant *badinage*, amidst which a home-truth burst forth every now and again, like the explosion of a cracker at a fête.

Louis was enchanted, for, thanks to his companion, he found himself the object of much attention, and he left Emilie to speak and do as she liked, merely aiding her when she needed support by a few happy, good-natured remarks, and, above all, obeying with great docility the pressure he sometimes felt on his arm as a signal to direct their walk through the rooms. She scarcely stood still a

minute to speak in her disguised tones to the guests with whom she was acquainted—and they were in the majority—before she moved on again, scanning the crowd with her clear-sighted eyes as if she were eagerly seeking some one.

In this way they reached, Louis and she, the door of the conservatory, where, beneath broad-leaved plants, and amidst moss soft as silk and emerald green, flowed, with silvery rippings, a little stream, which issued from a ewer held by a marble nymph, and fell at last into a basin with porphyry brim. A gilded trellis-work, over which grew red and white camelias, covered the walls, and from the glass roof fell creepers which intertwined like long green serpents, while a black marble Venus on a bronze pedestal seemed to be the presiding and mysterious goddess of this tropical retreat, where the heavy exhalations of the plants united with the sharp perfume of the peat mould to form a warm and enervating atmosphere.

As soon as they had entered the door, Louis felt Emilie's hand tremble on his arm, while a stifled sigh escaped her lips. He did not need to question her—a glance had shown him Clément de Thauziat standing near a marble seat on which sat a woman in a white domino.

A lock of golden hair could be seen beneath the lady's hood, and though the upper part of the face was covered by a black velvet mask there was nothing to hide the crimson mouth, with its double row of pearly teeth. When she smiled a delicious dimple appeared on each cheek, and, as far as one could judge for the flowing garment which disguised her, her figure was tall and elegant. As she sat, gently swinging a tiny foot encased in a white satin

slipper, a glimpse could be caught of an exquisite ankle, with the rosy skin showing through the fine, open-work stocking. Her hands, which were rather large, were playing with a fan composed of pale pink feathers.

Clément, in a white satin waistcoat, with a flower in his buttonhole, and looking as handsome as an Italian prince, was lazily talking as he familiarly fanned his companion with his opera hat.

"Oh, oh! Here is Monsieur de Thauziat," exclaimed Emilie, in a shrill treble voice. "And with a pretty woman, as usual. Good evening, madame," she continued, bowing with comic grace. "Are you not afraid of compromising yourself by flirting with so handsome a man?"

The white domino made no reply, but carelessly fanned herself.

"You will not crack your voice, my pretty one, if you are not more talkative," pursued Emilie. "But, oh, what a pretty foot you have! How about the hand? Let us see——"

And before Thauziat's companion could make any resistance she had taken her hand and was quickly stripping off the long white Swedish kid glove. Then she felt the fingers and palm, turning them about with the air of a fortune-teller.

"Can you tell fortunes, pretty one?" asked Clément, with a smile.

"When I am asked to do so; only I am not very discreet, and I reveal all I see."

"That only makes it the more interesting. What has been predicted for you, Louis? For I suppose you took advantage of your exceptional chance and insisted on knowing your fate?"

“No, I did not; so your companion will be the first to have the future revealed to her, if she cares to hear about it.”

The white domino made no answer and tried to withdraw her hand, but Emilie held it tightly in her nervous fingers, and, unless she chose to commence a struggle which might have turned to her disadvantage, the lady could do nothing to regain her freedom.

Emilie bent over the rosy palm in silence. Her eyes gleamed fiendishly through the openings in her mask and her mouth curved as though to utter a sarcasm.

“Oh, oh!” said she, in two different intonations. “This is a very curious hand, and it is impossible to preserve any illusions about its possessor after studying it, for it gives every information about her character. The line of the head predominates over the line of life, and absolutely overwhelms the line of the heart, which means that every passion, caprice, or desire, and, in fact, every important characteristic, is governed by the reason. And here is the Mount of Venus tolerably well developed, but so closely connected with that of Mercury that the instinct of gain and profit triumphs over that of love. Oh, it’s no good denying it, it is written there,” she continued, touching the centre of the hand with her thin finger; “our favours are not to be had for the asking, and to gain our approval, gold must be spent with a lavish hand——”

The pitiless examination was abruptly stopped, for the lady in the white domino suddenly rose and violently snatched away her hand, while the expression in her eyes as she turned them on Emilie was simply murderous.

“Why, whatever is the matter?” cried Mademoiselle

Lereboulley, like a teasing urchin. "Madame is angry? Madame is hurt? Pardon me, madame is perhaps a woman of society? But, nowadays, the love of some women of society costs as dear as that of women of a very different class!"

Louis had uneasily drawn nearer as he saw the threatening turn the incident was taking. He seemed more eager to protect the lady in the white domino from Emilie's violence than the latter from the anger of the woman she had so cruelly insulted, though, for some seconds, Mademoiselle Lereboulley seemed in actual danger. Her victim's face had turned livid, and her teeth were clenched upon her white lower lip. She raised her hands with a hiss of rage, as if about to strike, and then, seeing that she was powerless to avenge the insult she had received, she abruptly turned and left the conservatory, muttering,

"She shall pay for this."

"I shall pay for this! I daresay," cried Emilie, sending a loud burst of laughter after the retreating woman. "Didn't I tell you, one never got anything out of you for nothing!"

She turned towards her companion, and, pointing to the beautiful fugitive—

"There, go after her. You know you are dying to do so."

"Are you saying that to make me leave you alone with Thauziat?" asked Louis, laughingly.

"Perhaps," replied the girl, placing her hand on Clément's arm. "I really ought to be very grateful to this redoubtable champion for not having taken up the cudgels of his lady-love against me."

"She is quite able to fight her own battles alone," answered Thauziat, calmly.

"And you leave her to fly without hastening after her?"

"Do you not see that she has a cavalier ready to her hand?" he returned, glancing at Louis who was already on the track of the white domino.

"You are not jealous? And yet she is very lovely."

"She certainly is lovely, but there is not the slightest reason for me to be jealous."

"Or rather there is *no longer* the slightest reason. And is that true?"

"Do I not say so?"

"What a splendid reason!" cried Emilie, with a laugh that was a little forced. "A man may be sufficiently stupid to be satisfied with an argument like that, but a woman—ridiculous!"

"I never take the trouble to tell falsehoods."

"Besides, with me they would be useless. I know too much of the truth for you to attempt to deceive me."

"Did you read it in the hand of the beautiful blonde?" asked Clément, smiling.

"Whether I read it in her hand or in your eyes does not matter. I know it."

"Let me see whether you do."

"Very well, then, come into this little corner, where we shall not be disturbed."

And she drew Clément under a large Bourbon palm whose enormous leaves formed a sort of bower, beneath which was a seat of gilded cane. Climbing heliotropes scattered an exquisite perfume on the air, the little stream murmured and rippled between its mossy banks over the white pebbles of its bed, a soft light filtered through the foliage overhead, while the music from the orchestra only

reached their ears in snatches, as though to remind them that they were not utterly alone and that around this delicious oasis of peace and freshness the tide of society was rushing fast and furious without rest or intermission.

Nestled in her corner, Mademoiselle Lereboulley gave herself up for a moment to the pleasure of studying her companion's face. He meanwhile waited calmly and good-temperedly, in perfect security. An onlooker would have said that he knew he could not escape this interview, and that he had fully prepared himself for it. It was he who first broke the silence.

"My dear little sorceress," he said gaily, "you must now offer an explanation. You pretend to know the truth, so let us see what you have hidden in your casket of scandal."

"Very well," returned Emilie. "We will commence with the beautiful Diana, who is the wearer of the white domino. She can be easily recognised by her golden hair, so that there is no sorcery in identifying her—and after her, it will be your turn. It was you who discovered her, in London, in 1878, and gave her her first start. Her name was then Kate Browne and she was serving behind a bar in Chancery Lane, where she dispensed sandwiches and ale to the solicitors' clerks. Her wealthier admirers had no cause to complain of her hard heartedness. She was exceedingly ignorant, but as beautiful as illiterate, and when a law-suit led you by chance to the place where she served, she inspired you with both admiration and pity—an artist like yourself could not witness unmoved this marvel of seventeen spoiling her hands by rinsing out glasses, and ruining her mind by

drinking with second-rate men about town. Although your rule is never to hamper yourself with a woman, you took her under your protection and her position was at once entirely changed. It was then after the season and you were visiting at different country houses in Yorkshire and Scotland for the shooting, but between each visit you passed a few days with her. You had given her masters, because it hurts your refinement to hear people with whom you have much intercourse speak bad grammar, and because you do not like to receive letters in which the rules of orthography are utterly disregarded, and she profited by your generosity to such a degree that, in a few months, she was so altered that her former companions in pleasure or want would not have known her. Her face resembled the Kate of former times, but in ways and behaviour she was a lady. When the rough corners of ignorance and coarseness had been polished off and she had become a dangerous instrument admirably formed for vice, the exigencies of your life recalled you to Paris, and you restored her her liberty after bestowing on her a kiss and a thousand pounds in bank notes. She was now Diana, but she was not yet Lady Olifaunt. She had all that is needed for a gallant career—a marvellous beauty, an utterly corrupted mind and, above all, no scruples. She only wanted a partner to make the conquest of society, and that partner she soon found in the person of Sir James—”

Thauziat had listened so far without a sign of any kind. His handsome face was so calm and smiling that one would have sworn from his appearance that there was no question of himself at all, and that this history was absolutely indifferent to him. It was only at this moment that he gave

a slight start of surprise. Then he said calmly, without even taking the trouble to attempt a denial :

“Who has given you such good information? There are very few people who know what you have just related to me.”

“I lived in England for some years,” replied Emilie, still in an assumed voice.

“You do not speak with any accent,” remarked Thauziat, with a glance of incredulity.

“Diana has hardly any more than I have and she has only been in France for two years, but creatures like her are especially gifted. Shall I continue?”

“Yes, you are interesting and amusing me greatly.”

“If Diana were here, we should be still more amused.”

“Why, would you relate this before her?”

“Certainly I would.”

“You hate her?”

“I do not honour her so far. I despise her as I would the mire beneath my feet.”

“You should take care! She is by no means an in-offensive woman, and is quite capable of using vitriol.”

Emilie could not repress a gesture of boyish indifference.

“Pooh! And if she did disfigure me, how do you know I should not gain by it?” she asked in her natural bitter tones.

“Coquetry prompts you to say that,” returned Thauziat gallantly.

“Ah, I see you don’t know who I am,” she said with a nasal twang.

There was a pause; then she continued her narrative.

“Diana is well worthy of attention, but Sir James

Olifaunt is still more remarkable. He belongs to an excellent family, and, when young, went to India, where he did not make a fortune, but where he did contract habits which have clung to him all his life. Gambler, rake, drunkard, he is all these, but he manages to hide his vices under irreproachable manners. He lives on the liberality shown him by Lady Olifaunt's lovers, not one of whom dares to manifest the least want of respect, for he is a first-rate shot and the death of three men can be laid at his door—oh, killed in duel, of course! Sir James is a gentleman, he does not murder. And yet this bully cringes to you, and it all tends to make one believe that you know things of a very compromising nature about him."

"Perhaps I do."

"Do you know in what parish he married Diana?"

"No. But I know they were married in England."

"By the blacksmith at Gretna-Green, no doubt? They were joined by a blow of the hammer! At any rate their interests form a strong link between them, and woe to him who falls into their clutch! Therefore do not allow that innocent Louis Hérault, whose friend you call yourself, to advance any farther in the intrigue he has commenced with the enchantress. He is pursuing it in earnest, but there may still be time to undeceive him, though you alone can do it."

"What do you fear for him?"

"Everything. With such a woman the worst is to be dreaded. Louis Hérault is very rich, and very much in love. She may make him run away with her, and then, what would Sir James do?"

"Nothing. I will answer for that."

“But if it should make Louis unhappy?”

“You are right. He is young and does not know what line of conduct he ought to follow with Diana, but I have the means of curing him, and will use them should it be necessary.”

“What are they?”

“Excuse me if I do not tell you.”

“You are very mysterious.”

“I am very discreet.”

For a moment Emilie was silent, then she whispered, as if the lace of her mask formed a screen through which her voice could hardly pass—

“Then what would you reply if you were asked whom you love?”

“I could tell the truth without compromising anyone: I love no one.”

“Your heart is free?”

“Completely.”

“Only since a short time then?”

“Since always. I have never loved.”

Thauziat had become very grave. He fixed his searching gaze on the woman who was striving to puzzle him, then said slowly and seriously—

“Until now, my heart has never thrilled with love. I have had gallant adventures and I have loved in the ordinary and light acceptation of the word, which is yet the most serious a man can utter, but I have never felt myself ready to give up my life rather than relinquish a woman. If ever one of my friends had come to me and said: ‘I am in love with your mistress,’ I should have felt no sorrow in giving up my claims to her affection, and I should never

have thought of the matter again, except to be glad that I had not made two people miserable when it was in my power to make them happy. Since I reached the age of reason I have been fighting against the difficulties of life; I have made every effort to surmount the obstacles in my path, I have tried to vanquish fate, and I have come off victorious in my battle with fortune. In my struggles I have had to form my opinions of those who were on the same side as myself, and of those who were against me, and I very soon found that in general the ones merited very little esteem, and the others as little fear. It always seemed to me that in reality to succeed, it only needed the determination to succeed, and that the world was at the feet of those who had the strongest wills. Until now I have had a great deal of determination as regards my fortune, but I never stopped to make up my mind about my happiness. One of these days, I shall discover the woman who has been created for me—for there is another half specially destined for every being in this world—and that day I shall place all the resources of my energy at the service of my passion. The woman I love *must* belong to me, and I feel that to obtain her I would hesitate at nothing.”

“And if there was a woman who loved you now?”

“I would do all in my power to love her in return, but I know beforehand that I should not succeed. A town already captured has no attraction for me. What I demand is conquest—I desire to become the master of the impregnable fortress whose walls have to be scaled at the risk of mortal injuries—in short, my nature longs for battle. I was born with an instinctive horror of all that is conventional,

pre-arranged or common-place, and every event in my life bears the impress of my liking for new and strange sensations, for all that is unique, or precious on account of its rarity. Perhaps it is a misfortune for me to be so constituted. I often tell myself that I shall suffer cruelly through some terrible deception, and yet I cannot bring myself to regret being thus a seeker of the impossible who would be, as I am well aware, somewhat pretentious, if he had not the excuse of perfect sincerity."

"Then if a girl, very rich, very clever, not pretty—far from it—but capable of filling whatever position fate chose to allot her, offered you the hand she has refused to every brilliant, titled, and even noted man Paris contains, what answer would you make to this woman, bold enough to step beyond the barrier of worldly propriety and to come to you herself, proud enough to think that you would be able to understand the compliment of her choice and with a heart loving enough to compensate for the wretched imperfections of her form by its continual and constant affection? What would you reply?"

The girl's figure seemed to expand as she spoke, and her eyes sparkled as they looked through the holes in her velvet mask. She had placed her trembling hand on Clément's arm and her whole being exhaled a troublous charm. Under her pale silk domino, she seemed like one of the disguised fairies one reads of in children's tales; would not the first word of love from Prince Charming effect a metamorphosis, and cause a young princess to emerge from the hood and drapery, triumphant and superb in her restoration to liberty and happiness? But the word so eagerly awaited was not pronounced, and for some moments Thauziat

remained plunged in a painful meditation, while over his handsome, manly features came an expression of deep melancholy. It was only when he heard a heavy sigh from the woman sitting beside him that he again raised his head. The domino's hand was no longer on his arm, but he took it and gently pressed it between his own. Then he said, with an accent of sorrow he did not attempt to dissimulate—

“I shall never forget the words you have just uttered, and whatever service you may ever request me to render you, you will find me ready to attempt.”

And as the young girl started in surprise and trouble—

“Yes, I know who you are,” he continued, with tender respect. “I recognised you at once, and perfectly understand your meaning. You are speaking of yourself, and you are certainly doing me more honour than I deserve. Perhaps, and I have a presentiment that it is so, I am about to turn my back on what would ensure my true happiness; but I should not be the man I am if I were so inconsistent as to do what I have decided I ought not to do. It would be wrong—nay, wicked—to bind myself with a chain which I could not throw off at my wish, for I should certainly break it and by so doing betray and grieve a woman worthy of my entire affection and esteem. I shall be the abject slave of the one who gains my heart; but, until I have met that woman, I cannot answer for myself. I should only make you unhappy, and it would make me wretched and ashamed to think I was doing so. You know that for a long time my liking for you has been especial and sincere. Forget on your side all that has been said within this last half-hour, but give me the right to think of it as of the most delicately flattering proof a woman could

ever give a man of the confidence she places in his honour. And now give me your hand freely and frankly, and show me that you are the woman I have depicted and that I believe you to be by forgiving me the momentary sorrow I am causing you."

Emilie slowly removed her mask and revealed to Thauziat her pale face, down which the tears were yet running. The satin lining of the mask was humid, and she drew his attention to it with a sad smile.

"Some women weep only for joy," she said, softly. "I know but the tears of grief and disillusion, and yet those I have just shed are amongst the sweetest that have ever moistened my eyes. You are proud, Clément, and you have reason to be so. You owe everything to yourself, and you are, therefore, within your rights when you make of your 'I' a pitiless divinity to whom you sacrifice all. I should have been your friend and ally rather than your wife, and you may be sure all your efforts would have been well seconded by me. But there are some people whose lives are destined to be uniformly unhappy, and I am one of them, in spite of the envy I excite. I must ask you to believe that I would have given everything I possess to find favour in your eyes, for you are the only man amongst all those I have met who has seemed to me worthy of a woman's attachment."

Thauziat gravely shook his head as he turned to Emilie with a look full of modesty.

"You have not enough indulgence for others, and you have too much for me. If you regarded me with unprejudiced eyes you would be the first to perceive it."

For some minutes they remained silent, each trying to

regain their self-possession. The sweet quiet of this leafy corner formed an exquisite contrast to the tumult of the ball and the agitation of their own thoughts. Through the doorway could be seen the couples gliding round in obedience to the rhythm of the valse, and the faces of all, men and women alike, wore that air of uniform content which denotes a complete absence of thought. They were whirling round and round, and one could see that at that moment the world, which was itself spinning round, held nothing else to occupy them but the pleasure of so turning.

"They are enjoying themselves," said Emilie, glancing towards the dancers. "They are very happy."

She had risen and replaced her mask.

"Now, will you do me a great favour? Yes, no doubt. Well, then, do not pay any more attention to me this evening. I am going straight to my carriage; it is only a five minutes' drive home from here, and they will be waiting up for me, so I shall not even have to ring the bell. Only, do look after that poor Louis who is now in the hands of his English witch. There, those are my wishes."

"I will obey them."

They returned to the ball-room, merely walking side by side, and when, after they had made a few steps among the throng, Clément turned to speak to Emilie, she was no longer beside him, and, if he pleased, he could look upon his strange conversation with her as a dream.

Thauziat went into the drawing-rooms, whither the dancers had retired to flirt. Lounging on soft, low seats, standing in the large bay-windows, or wandering about arm-in-arm, men and women were talking in whispers with mouth close to the listening ear as if the words of love ought to

be murmured in close proximity, lest, in passing through the air, they should lose some of their penetrating charm. In a little room furnished in Turkish fashion, and which the count used as a smoking-room, couples were reclining amidst the cushions of the low divans, and there it was not words which were being exchanged in the soft light shed by a Moorish lamp, it was kisses.

Clément passed quickly through. He did not need to disturb the lovers. Diana would not be there, for her English modesty would have been shocked by the *laisser-aller* of this ending to the ball, and he must seek her in a more temperate atmosphere. He went through the vast dining-room where supper was being served on little round tables, amidst the clinking of silver and china, with true Russian luxury and profusion. Then he returned to the card-room and found Lereboulley and Sir James in the same places, continuing, with their same companions, the same game—poker—they had been playing since the beginning of the evening. The senator looked vexed, while before Sir James, who was very red, lay a large heap of gold and bank-notes. The Englishman had several times held the royal flush, and he was evidently fleecing the other three players.

Thauziat went up to the table, and, turning to Lereboulley while one of the players was dealing, asked—

“Have you seen Louis Hérault lately?”

Sir James looked up from his cards with a friendly glance for Clément—

“He passed through here about half-an-hour ago,” he replied.

“Was he alone?”

"No. He had a white domino on his arm, and they went out by that door after stopping a moment to watch us play."

"Well, they didn't bring you bad luck!" said Clément, jokingly.

"No, as you see."

The Englishman had spoken in the tranquil way of a husband who does not imagine that the costume he has just described conceals his wife. Lereboulley seemed a great deal more concerned, and turning to Clément—

"Take my hand for a moment, old fellow," he said. "I shouldn't mind stopping a little while to see if that will change my luck."

"You want to deliver me up to the tender mercies of the terrible Sir James? No, thank you. Keep your place, dear boy, you can afford to do so with your means."

And disregarding the banker's supplicating glances he continued his way, and entered the library which was a large room surrounded by low book-cases full of precious manuscripts and rare medals, while, on one side, a little glass-covered balcony looking on to the Champs-Élysées formed a charming nook with its silk-cushioned bamboo easy-chairs, and its jardinières filled with flowers. The large window which formed one side of the balcony was thrown open, and Louis and Diana were leaning on the iron balustrade, talking as they inhaled the pure night air. It was two o'clock and the stars no longer shone so brightly in the gradually whitening sky. The warm air was filled with the perfume of the chestnut blossoms, and below the window stretched a row of carriages the whole length of

the street, looking like a black serpent with glittering eyes. There was a deep silence all around, and, in this house crowded with people, shining with light and filled with the sound of joyous music, Diana and Louis felt as though they were utterly alone.

From the moment she had fled from the conservatory to escape Mademoiselle Lereboulley's terrible jests, the young man had not left Diana, and she, on her side, had brought every artifice her coquetry could suggest to bear upon him. He had found her standing by a window outside the conservatory, with bowed head and tearful eyes, and she had allowed him to take her hand as if she were unconscious of his presence. He had tried to talk to her, but she had made no answer, and seemed unaware that he was speaking. Her bosom heaved with sighs, her lips quivered, and Louis, overcome by this grief, which was yet so charming to see, gently pressed Diana's fingers, and then, as they were not withdrawn, ventured to place his arm around the slender waist which did not seek to avoid his embrace. And so when the adorable woman's grief and anguish began at last to subside, she found herself in Louis' arms, with her head almost on his shoulder. She pushed him away with charming indignation, and stepped back a pace, with an expression of severity and displeasure in her eyes and mouth.

"You see the effect of such abominable calumny," she said, in a voice broken with sobs. "You dare to treat me as you would half the women here! Do you then believe that what was said of me was true?"

And as Louis made a gesture of entreaty and opened his lips to protest ;

"Do not reply," she resumed. "I do not wish to hear idle words, or untruthful protestations which would not serve to conceal from me your scorn. What crime have I committed that I should be hated? Why am I thus hunted down? I cannot bear it, and I will go away, never to return. The people who dislike me shall not see me again. This Emilie—for I recognised her—persecutes and tortures me, though I have never injured her in any way. I do not even know her. Is it because she is ugly and deformed that she has a spite against me? But it isn't my fault that she is so plain. If her father knew of her behaviour to me he would soon see into it; but I will not make any complaint. I should be afraid of grieving him, and of forcing him to give explanations which might be painful to him to prove to that detestable girl that he has the right—oh, the most natural and the most sacred one—to interest himself in me."

She crossed her hands on her breast like a martyr awaiting in the arena the ferocious animal that is to tear her limb from limb, and her lips moved as though in prayer. Louis, dazzled by her marvellous beauty and bewitched by her charm, did not even try to understand her words as long as he could hear the sound of her voice. At this moment he would have disowned Emilie for ever although he loved her as a sister, he would have picked a quarrel with Thauziat, he would have given all he possessed only to take this adorable enchantress in his arms and bear her away as his booty, which no one else had a right to touch. His looks betrayed his desire, for Diana turned away her eyes as if they were hurt by too bright a light, and, drawing her domino around her with a modest, shame-stricken

gesture, she drew back a step, blushing like a school-girl.

"Do not leave me thus," exclaimed Louis, in ardent tones. "You know you can command me anything. You know that I am your faithful slave, your devoted friend, and that I am ready to defend you against any one and every one."

"You would have too much to do if you attempted that," said Diana, gently. "Besides I have no right to your services, and I cannot allow you to fight on my behalf. Go, and leave alone the unhappy woman against whom every one may cast the stone of slander."

She could not have spoken words better calculated to make Louis long to die for her. He approached her, and said with a smile of youthful confidence :

"Take my arm, and for the future fear nothing."

She raised her eyes to his, and then, as though fascinated by the firm resolution she read there, took the arm which was offered her, and followed the young man.

They entered the card-room, as Sir James had said, and Diana could not resist the desire to approach the table where they were playing poker. Her husband cast an indifferent glance at her and continued his game. Lereboulley displayed more agitation, and it needed a very imperious glance from Lady Olifaunt to make him keep his seat. The senator was apparently suffering torture. His face and ears became a brilliant red, and he presented the spectacle of an old man who is a prey to a desire which he is forced to restrain, and which threatens to produce a fit of apoplexy. Then Diana glided away like a phantom in her white domino, and the next instant she was on the

balcony of Count Woréseff's library with Louis by her side.

At first she remained silent, leaning against the iron balustrade and enjoying the soft night breeze which caressed her snowy forehead. She had removed her mask, and Louis could give himself up to the admiration of her exquisite face, than which it was impossible to imagine one nearer perfection. In her large blue eyes, fringed with long, black lashes, was an expression of gentle candour; her crimson mouth had the soft curves of a Madonna's lips, while her little nose, with its delicate, rosy nostrils gave a delicious air of self-will to the face. It was the most adorable countenance a lover could desire, with the seraphic purity of the eyes and mouth and the utter audacity of the nose which seemed to be defying the whole world. But at this moment Louis did not notice this diabolic nose. He only saw the angelic mouth and eyes, and he thought that to have the right to close those orbs with a kiss which would make the white eyelids droop beneath its voluptuousness a man might well commit a crime and feel no regret.

After a few minutes Diana gave an exclamation of vexation, passed her hand over her forehead as though to rid herself of a disagreeable thought, and turning towards her companion :

"I beg your pardon," she said with a sad smile, "but I had forgotten myself in the thoughts of the painful past which forms my whole existence. For though I am still very young—I am only twenty-four—I have had, and have still, much trouble."

Then as she saw Louis' look of surprise, she shook her

head, while her bright hair shone like a helmet of gold, and continued :

“ Oh, I have no longer the same cause for unhappiness as in bygone times. I have known what it is to suffer poverty—almost hunger. My mother died, leaving me alone in the world, for my father had entirely lost sight of us. It was only by chance that his powerful protection was restored to me, and God alone knows for what calumnies his generous bounty has served as a pretext. But I do not regret my former misery when I compare it to the days which have succeeded it. Then at least I was free and my own mistress, while now I am bound to a man who will never understand me.”

She shuddered, drew her silken hood around her head, and then in tones that sounded as if she were making a strong effort of will to restrain her sobs :

“ But I do not know why I am telling you all this. What does it matter to you how I suffer? You cannot help it.”

“ You are telling me because you know that I love you,” replied Louis. “ Oh, yes, you do know ! For the last six months you could have guessed it from my agitation when I approached you, from the trembling of my voice when I was happy enough to speak to you. Everything has told it you—my timidity when I followed you without daring to risk a confession, my boldness at this present moment when I am pouring all the love and adoration my heart contains at your feet. Yes, I have seen that you are not beloved, and that you are not happy. Good God ! How can it be possible for a man to be with you daily and hourly without feeling the influence of your charm, with-

out falling at your knees never to rise again ! When I even look at you, a quiver passes through me ; when my hand touches yours it seems to me that my veins are filled with liquid fire, and I would give my life to call you mine, for I know that one hour of your love would be worth all the days I have still to live."

Louis had murmured his avowal in a soft, caressing whisper, bending nearer and nearer towards his companion. His eyes gleamed, his lips were burning, and Diana looked at him from under her half-closed lids, moved in spite of herself by this outburst of sincere and youthful passion. Really he was charming just then, and worthy of being loved. The Englishwoman's lips expanded in a melancholy smile :

"How many have already told me what I have just heard from you, without my believing one word of it fortunately, for it was only dictated by caprice or idle fancy. It seems a fatality in my existence that every man I know should think himself obliged to swear that he adores me. And what false vows, what faithless promises they are that are made me ! Yet you, perhaps, are more genuine than the rest, and really love me, for you have been true to me for some months. But if I listened to you, how long would your passion last ? A woman is a plaything for men like you ! I have been told that you have lived a very fast life, although you are still so young, and besides, you are always with Clément de Thauziat."

"You are not going to tell me anything bad about him, surely ?" asked Louis, in trembling tones. "People say he has known you intimately for a long while."

"Come, be frank ; you have heard he was my lover ?"

questioned Diana, with sudden harshness in her voice. "Perhaps he has told you so himself. Some men are capable of the most infamous actions to gratify their vanity."

"He has never said anything to me about you, although I have often questioned him, for all that concerned you was of so much interest to me that I would rather have learnt who and what you were, even though it would have wounded me deeply to hear it. Alas! I love you so fondly that I am afraid I should only have forgotten whatever ill I might have heard, and that my affection would have been as intense as before."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

Suddenly Diana's face changed completely. Her eyelids quivered, her nostrils dilated, her rosy mouth curved sarcastically and with an air of bravado she cried :

"And if I told you myself that Clément has loved me, that he did not find me quite irresponsible to his passion, and that perhaps I still——"

She was unable to finish the sentence. Louis had seized her by the shoulders, and, with a violence it was useless to resist, had lifted her above the iron balustrade. Another instant and she might be crushed to atoms on the pavement of the street below. She did not move a muscle to defend herself. Her hair, unfastened by this brutal grasp, fell around her shoulders like a perfumed mantle, and as she lay in the arms of the man who held her life in his hands, there was an expression of radiant triumph on her face. For an instant they remained motionless, gazing into each other's eyes, then, writhing as might a green bough cast into a furnace, Diana sought Louis' lips and pressed on

them a long kiss. It seemed to the young man as if flashes of dazzling light were passing over the sky, there was a ringing in his ears and his brain whirled as he buried his hands in the wealth of golden hair, whose silky waves enveloped him like a sea of fire.

When he regained his senses, he saw that the sky was clear and bright, the street empty and dark, and he could hear in the distance the orchestra still playing its dreamy waltzes. Near him stood Diana, looking a little pale as she gathered up her hair. She only made a feeble resistance when he took her eagerly in his arms, and with his mouth close to her ear he whispered :

“ I adore you ! ”

“ And yet you would have killed me,” she said, with an incredulous shake of the head.

“ Why did you put my affection to so terrible a test ? ”

“ To see if you really loved me. But are you indeed so jealous ? ”

“ For a moment my torture was so cruel that I was bereft of reason. There was no truth, was there, in what you said to me ? ”

“ None whatever.”

“ Now I could not bear the thought of sharing your affection with another.”

Diana looked down as she replied somewhat constrainedly—

“ You forget that I do not belong only to myself.”

“ Have you not often told me yourself, that you are married to a man who is only husband to you in name ? ”

“ Still, however much his conduct towards me is to be censured, I am not the less his wife, and nothing can alter

the fact that I bear his name. Listen ! I have been foolish, and I am already beginning to bitterly reproach myself for my imprudence. Already you are assuming the right of directing my conduct and if I listen to you I am lost. Therefore I entreat you to forget what has just passed. For a moment, carried away by your passion, intoxicated by your words, I forgot my own honour and gave myself up to the mad dream of devoting my whole life to you. But you must see that such a thing is impossible. You will have been the only man to whom I have ever abandoned myself even for a moment, and I could have loved you—I do already love you too much for my own happiness—but we have not yet committed any wrong, and it will be better to suffer and to part.”

“Do not hope that I should ever consent to such a thing.”

“Then what do you want ?” exclaimed Diana.

“You.”

Again he held her in his arms and felt her heart beating against his own. He would have kissed her, but she avoided his lips and he only succeeded in touching a thick twist of her golden hair.

Diana seemed almost in a delirium. Instead of repelling Louis, she clasped him closely to her, while inarticulate cries escaped her lips. The tears flowed down her cheeks, her heart was apparently torn by the most passionate love and the deepest despair. Louis gazed at her, too much fascinated by her beauty to think of taking advantage of this momentary madness which left her without defence.

“I want you, and for ever,” he repeated.

And she answered, as she fixed her eyes on him—

“Yes, I will be yours, come what may ! I will die rather than give you up !”

Then, exhausted by the emotions they had experienced, they stood on the balcony, pressed close to one another in silent enjoyment of the delicious moments.

The sound of footsteps disturbed their mute happiness. They sprang apart, and, looking round, saw Thauziat beside them.

"I have been looking for you this last half-hour," he said, coolly. "Did you come here to get a little fresh air?"

"Yes," replied Diana, composedly, while Louis stepped into the library to hide his agitation. "The heat in the ball-room was stifling." Then, after a short pause, "What time is it?"

"Three o'clock in the morning," answered Thauziat, looking at his watch.

"It is time to leave. I must go and tear Sir James from the pleasures of the card-table."

She turned towards Louis, and holding out her hand with friendly indifference, as though nothing extraordinary had passed between them—

"Good-bye," she said. "I suppose I shall see you some time to-day?"

"Certainly," he replied, bowing as he released her hand.

When he again raised his head the train of her white domino was disappearing through the doorway, and he was left alone with his friend.

"Well, I left you plenty of time to talk to Lady Olifaunt," said Clément; "and I hope you noticed that I came in very discreetly, and made a noise to announce my presence. You seem on the best of terms with her."

"Yes," said Louis, shortly.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Thauziat. "Is that all your gratitude prompts you to say? It isn't my fault if she has not been kind to you."

Louis laid his hand on his friend's arm, and looking at him gravely—

"Listen, Clément. If you do not mind, we will never speak of Lady Olifaunt to each other again; it would be far better than to discuss her with this insulting levity."

"Eh? What?" cried Thauziat, in surprise. "What's the matter? What has happened? What has she been saying to you? Whence this sudden respect—this unexpected esteem?"

"Three words will explain all: I adore her!"

"That's nothing new. You've been smitten with her for the last six months."

"I adore her, I tell you!" repeated Louis, hotly. "And I am ready to do anything to be always with her—elope with her, marry her, if needs were!"

Thauziat fidgetted one of his white, well-shaped hands, and he frowned as he murmured to himself—

"Women are clearer-sighted than we are. Emilie was quite right when she said what the affair might lead to."

He turned to his friend.

"To run away with her would be a great deal, to marry her, too much. Men don't marry Diana when they can so easily dispense with the ceremony."

"Ah! Take care, Clément!" exclaimed Louis, turning white. "You are insulting the woman I love, and I will not have it!"

"You are threatening me, I believe?" said Thauziat, in accents so harsh that the nerves of the younger man

vibrated. "*Pardieu!* That is, indeed, the best means of making me hold my tongue! If the charming creature pleases you, you blockhead, be her lover; but, for Heaven's sake, don't run away with her, and, above all, don't get her divorced from the excellent Sir James. He would never forgive you."

Clément began to laugh. His gaiety exasperated Hérault who went up to his friend with clenched fists, crying—

"Once more, I tell you, take care! It is cowardly to insult a woman."

"Take care yourself!" interrupted Thauziat. "You young fool to let yourself be taken in by plausible tales uttered by a pretty mouth! Are you so far gone that you mistrust my friendship, and hesitate between me and a woman? It would serve you right to let you be taken in, and I would do it if I had not promised someone, who is good enough to take an interest in you, to keep you out of the hornet's nest you are doing your best to get into. I suppose you believe in Diana's purity and affection, don't you?"

"Yes."

As Louis answered, Lereboulley came in from the card-room.

"It is getting late," said the senator; "but I suppose you young men intend to stay some time longer? I am going to walk home, so good night, or rather good morning."

He waved his hand to them, and moved heavily away. Then Thauziat turned to his friend, and said gravely—

"Lereboulley is going to walk home—let us follow him. You will soon know what to believe."

They went downstairs, put on their overcoats, and went out into the Champs-Élysées. The senator was walking down the deserted avenue about twenty yards in front of them, with a cigar in his mouth, his hands in his pockets, and his stick under his arm.

"He is going home," whispered Louis.

"You will see," replied Clément. "But let us walk in the shadow of the trees so that he does not recognise us."

They reached the *rond-point*, and there, instead of turning into the Avenue d'Antin, Lereboulley kept to the left, crossed over the road as though he were going to the circus, and turned into the Avenue Gabriel. Thauziat had placed—almost forced—Louis' arm under his own, and he felt it tremble.

"Do you begin to suspect whither he is going?" he asked.

Louis made no reply, but his breath came loud and heavy, as if his heart were oppressed beneath some weight. The senator walked quietly on, never dreaming he was being followed, and when they were opposite the Café des Ambassadeurs, Thauziat stopped, drew Louis behind a clump of bushes and waited. Lereboulley walked about twenty paces farther on until he came to a little door in the garden railings hidden by ivy and, after mechanically glancing round to see he was not observed, turned the key and went in.

A stifled cry escaped Louis' lips. He turned pale as he looked at his friend, who made not the slightest movement, then in a trembling voice :

"The wretch! She led me to believe he was her father!"

Thauziat shrugged his shoulders.

"That is what she generally says ; she must give some explanation for the luxury in which she lives. Lereboulley has compromised himself for her ever since she has been in Paris, and that is why Emilie hates her so. Now be her lover if you like, but don't run away with her, for that is useless ; and don't marry her, for that would be disgraceful."

"I will never see her again !"

"There is no need to deny yourself that pleasure. She is nice to look at, but you mustn't believe her."

Louis took Clément's hand and pressed it.

"Forgive me for what I said to you," he said with emotion. "I was mad."

"I am not vexed with you for what you said. I am only angry with you for forcing me to betray a woman."

And with a sudden movement he threw his arm around his friend's shoulder and drew him far away from this house, which seemed to hold him spell-bound before it.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was one o'clock in the afternoon, and Hélène Graville had just finished lunch and resumed her work when a gentle ring at the bell called her to the door. She hurried to open it, and then drew back a step as she found herself face to face with a little old lady, richly dressed and with a scarf of black lace over her head, in whom she recognised Madame Hérault. The latter smiled at her attractive young tenant as she said :

“Excuse me if I am disturbing you, my child. I have come to see you, as you perceive, simply as a neighbour. I have heard that you are very clever at embroidery, and I thought I should like to entrust to you some very delicate work I want done.”

“Will you be good enough to come in, madame?” said Hélène, in her sweet voice. “Though I must apologise for my untidy room.”

Pieces of material were lying on the chairs, the sewing-machine was uncovered and ready for use, trimmings of jet and pearls had been taken out of their cardboard boxes, and were lying scattered about, and, near the window, from which Hélène had so often watched Louis, stood the table covered by a magnificent piece of silk half embroidered.

“Do not apologise,” said Madame Hérault, seating herself on a cane-bottomed chair. “I am used to the disorder entailed by work. I worked hard myself for forty years of

my life, and I garden every day now. And apparently you do the same, my dear."

She had risen and gone to the window, outside which was a box filled with hyacinths and climbing convolvulus.

"The creepers form an economical sun-blind in the summer," said the girl gaily, "and then I go out so seldom and my flowers remind me of the country. All my childhood was passed in the open air in the fields and woods, and when I came to Paris my greatest trial was being compelled to stay indoors so much. But one becomes accustomed to everything in time," she added with a charming smile.

"You are philosophic."

"I am obliged to be. If I did not always endeavour to see everything in its best light my mind would soon become soured, and I should think myself much to be pitied."

"And are you not to be pitied?"

"No, madame. At least not from a physical point of view, for I earn more than enough to live upon, though morally, yes. A year ago a misfortune befell me, for which I can never be consoled."

And as Madame Hérault's eyes expressed her kindly curiosity—

"I lost my mother," Hélène added, while her lip quivered, "and since then I have been quite alone."

She wiped away a tear, then raising her eyes to her visitor—

"Forgive me, madame, for troubling you with my sorrows. Will you tell me how I can be of use to you?"

Madame Hérault drew forth a parcel carefully tied up with pink ribbon, opened it and held out to Hélène a China crape shawl embroidered in different colours.

“I used it as a cover for a table in my bedroom and my maid has been stupid enough to burn a hole in the embroidery. I value the shawl exceedingly, because it was given me; do you think you could repair the damage? You see how delicate and various is the shading of the birds and flowers? They are almost as if they had been painted and I know it would be a difficult task, but I have heard you embroider with the fingers of a fairy.”

Hélène leant over the stuff and handled it gently with her supple fingers. She seemed to take a real pleasure in touching the gossamer-like tissue. Her taste for the refinements of luxury betrayed her aristocratic origin, and one could guess she was the descendant of a race created for elegance and wealth merely by the way she turned and unfolded the silky shawl.

While Hélène examined the work, Madame Hérault looked round the modest room. Everything was exquisitely clean, in spite of the disorder for which Hélène had apologised, and the shining furniture told of the daily attention it received. There was nothing vulgar or commonplace even in the arrangement of the room, and a little mirror artistically draped with plush, a few ornaments of no intrinsic value but tastefully arranged, a hanging book-case filled with leather-bound books on which a monogram was stamped—relics of former wealth—showed that the occupant of this humble lodging was far superior to her position. Near the fireplace hung the portrait of a young and elegant-looking man, in a black frame beneath which

a penny bunch of violets, still quite fresh, was fastened as a pious votive offering. Madame Hérault gazed at the portrait for some moments, but there was nothing in the face to awaken her memories.

"Is that your father?" she asked at last, turning to the work-girl.

"Yes, madame," answered Hélène, lowering her tone a little and speaking as if she were in a church.

"I was told your name was Hélène Graville," resumed Madame Hérault, "and I once knew a village of the same name in Normandy, near Saint-Aubin. Do you happen to come from there?"

"I was born at the Château de Graville," replied Hélène gravely.

Then both remained silent, thinking of the past. The young girl saw once again the large estate with its dark beech-woods, its green lawns sloping down to the Scie, its orchards filled with apple-trees which, in the springtime, were powdered white like the marquis of the court of Louis XV., and in the autumn, bent beneath the burden of their rosy-cheeked fruit. Again she felt the fresh sea-breeze blowing on her face, the breeze which impregnated the plants with its salt odours, and imparted to the grass the element of wholesomeness which caused the cows to give purer and more plentiful milk. On the hill, the stone and brick balustrade of the chateau terrace stood out against the sky, and amidst the clumps of lilac and laburnum-trees walked a man and woman in the sun. The man was tall and elegant, and resembled the portrait hanging in the little sitting-room. The woman was fair and white-skinned, and on her lips was a happy smile. Hélène followed them

with her eyes till they reached a thicket behind which they disappeared, leaving the terrace mournful and deserted as was now her life.

Old Madame Hérault had evoked from the past the black, smoky factory, with the noise of its hammers as they wrought the copper boilers, and, by the glare of the glowing furnaces, she saw Hérault again, bare-armed and hair glistening with copper dust, and she thought him handsome with his fair moustache and the clear complexion of the pure Normandy peasant. She had walked with him through the meadows on the banks of the little river, in the evenings, and under the influence of the springtime, intoxicated by the perfume of the flowering hawthorn hedgerows, they exchanged their first kiss. By what bitter tears had that kiss been followed! And now it was old Gandon who was furious and mortified at the desertion of his daughter, and who threatened to kill Hérault. How many sleepless nights she had passed, weeping the burning tears of sorrow, until at last the lady from the château had entered the inn bringing with her the man who had caused all this misery, and who had come to ask Gandon for Fifine's hand. And from that time could be traced all their happiness and prosperity. All was owing to the kindly impulse of a noble-hearted woman, whose only descendant was to-day poorer and more friendless than had ever been the innkeeper's daughter.

"So you were born at the Château de Graville?" asked Madame Hérault. "And your father was Monsieur Henri."

"Yes, madame," answered Hélène in astonishment. "But how could you have known that?"

"Mademoiselle," returned the old woman, with melancholy pride, "when I was only a poor village sempstress, I used to work at the château by the day, and I have often danced your father on my knees. When I see you earning your living in so precarious a way, when I think that perhaps you and yours have known actual want, I feel the most bitter grief and I reproach myself with the blackest ingratitude for having left it to chance to bring me in your path."

"Pray do not concern yourself about me, madame," interrupted Hélène. "I assure you that I want for nothing, and, thanks to Heaven, I was able, by my work, to keep my mother from want as long as she lived."

"You are a brave child, and I am very pleased to find you as you are. But I owe everything to your family and the little importance I possess is due to their goodness and generosity. Your grandmother gave me the dowry which enabled me to marry Monsieur Hérault, and it was with that money that he commenced the laborious task of amassing our fortune. If we are rich now, it is only thanks to Madame de Graville. Without her, Hérault would have remained a simple workman in a provincial factory, I should have stayed with my father, our strength and activity would not have been united, and not one of the enterprises, which we have so successfully carried out, would have been even attempted. You see, mademoiselle, that I am greatly indebted to yours, and consequently to you, and my gratitude will be the more, if you will allow me to acquit myself of my debt."

Mademoiselle de Graville crimsoned and drew back. She did not understand very well at what Madame Hérault was aiming, and she feared an offer of money which would have

been most repugnant to her, an offer which would have lowered her to the level of a beggar. Until now she had earned her own living, and had asked aid from no one. She felt hurt and humiliated and answered distantly—

“Madame, I am very glad my family was able to be of some service to yours, but I cannot see that you have any debt of which to acquit yourself. Keep your gifts for those who are truly necessitous. I shall always earn more than I want, as long as I can find work.”

But old Madame Hérault at once understood what was in Hélène’s mind. She guessed the annoyance her words had caused, and, wishing to dispel it, she approached the young girl and affectionately took her hand.

“My dear, you must be indulgent towards an old woman who only follows the promptings of her heart,” she said gently. “Do not fear that I am offering you money ; I know with whom I have to deal. You are of a family which gives but does not receive. But I am very old, and I have no one but a grandson who often leaves me alone, not from want of affection, but because he goes into society a great deal and his time is filled by his engagements, and so I am very solitary, and I have often regretted that Heaven did not see fit to give me a grand-daughter, who would have remained with me and prevented me from knowing the melancholy of loneliness. When I saw you, it seemed to me that chance had given me the child I have so often wished for, and I thought I could ask you to come and continue the good part your parents played towards me, and be, in your turn, my benefactress, by helping me at the conclusion of my life, as they helped me at the commencement.”

As she heard these kindly heartfelt words, the tears sprang to Hélène's eyes, and when Madame Hérault held out her arms, she threw herself on the old lady's breast without attempting to resist the impulse.

"Then you accept?" exclaimed Madame Hérault, joyfully.

Hélène freed herself from the embrace which seemed to be already making her a prisoner, and, slowly shaking her head, replied—

"I cannot yet give you an answer, madame. I am deeply grateful for the kindness you are showing me, but I wish to reflect and not to yield to the influence of a momentary and sentimental impulse which we might both one day regret. Do not be angry with me if I express myself freely and tell you exactly what I think. I have for a long while been subject to no one's will but my own, and in my habits of independence I have perhaps acquired rather more decision of character than is becoming to a woman. What you are at this moment asking me to do is to give up my liberty, to renounce my modest but tranquil existence, to go and live with you (who have every appearance of kindness, but whom I do not know) in a world which seems to me full of dangers and deceits. If I decided to do what you ask, it would be very difficult for me to ever retrace my step. The new habits I should form would make my poverty the more hard to bear, and a change which I might now justly think to be one for the better might only bring sorrow and discouragement. Therefore, I must think it over, and must weigh well the for and against. But whatever may be my decision, once it is arrived at nothing will make me change it."

“I see you have great strength of will,” said Madame Hérault, as she gazed at Hélène with interest; “and it surprises and delights me the more, because I never had. I have always done as others have wished. During his life, Hérault ruled the house; I only saw that his orders were carried out. After him my son took the reins into his own hands, though it is true he held them more slackly than his father, and I still obeyed. Now, Louis is the master, and he has only to smile for me to anticipate his every caprice. I am wrong to do so, I know. I ought to guide the weak, frivolous-minded boy, instead of saying ‘Very well’ to everything he chooses to propose; but what can I do? Fate seems to have decreed that the son shall be the inferior, in all sterling qualities, of the father, and that generally the fortune amassed by the grandfather shall be dissipated by the grandson. Our trade, which used to be so prosperous, is falling off for want of the impulse the master’s presence gives, and, as Monsieur Hérault so often said, a fortune which is not augmenting is diminishing. I shall not breathe freely as long as my grandson remains unmarried. Without counting cards and racing, a bachelor always finds plenty of unscrupulous women to help him squander his money. But as soon as Louis marries I am sure he will reform, for I know his gentle, kindly nature. He will adore his wife, he will love his children, and he will resume the direction of the factory instead of leaving it to a stupid board of directors, and I shall be able to thank Heaven that I have no longer any cause for uneasiness. But, in order to obtain this happy result, I want someone near me to advise and encourage me. I am very old, and there are many things of which I am ignorant, and which I have now no

opportunity of learning: aid me with your diplomacy and your tact. Bring yourself to see the good you can do, and to understand that it is you who are rendering me a service, instead of receiving one at my hands."

Hélène made no answer as she stood by the window with eyes abstractedly fixed on a ray of sunlight which was gilding the leaves of her convolvulus. She saw the living tendrils clung to the old house and imparted to it a charm of youthful freshness, while, deprived of its adornment of leaves and flowers, the black wall would present a wretched and forbidding aspect. And to her mind there came a sudden comparison between herself and the plant she tended every day. Would not her sunny, graceful youthfulness adorn this lonely hearth, as did the tender, delicate, convolvulus the rugged wall? Fate seemed to have placed her near the solitary, melancholy old woman, that she might only have to stretch out her arms to enfold her in their embrace, and become at once her protection and her joy.

Then there passed before her eyes the elegant, graceful form of Louis in his mourning garments as he crossed the courtyard at stated hours, when he lived with his old grandmother employing his time as would a model son. Would it, indeed, be possible to have, as Madame Hérault had said, a favourable influence over this young man's life, and to aid his grandmother in her efforts to tear him from the bad society which lured him from his home? What likeness was there between the impudent fool who had followed her the evening before, accompanied by his dark, proud-looking friend, and the gentle, thoughtful orphan she had so often watched from her window? Was not his

companion his evil genius? If only she could dispute this latter's sway, restore Louis to reason and wisdom, and transform him from a *blasé*, useless spendthrift, to a vigorous, clever, hardworking man! But for whose profit would she be accomplishing this work of salvation? Some girl would make her appearance who would become engaged to Louis and eventually marry him. The grandmother had said, "Once he is married, I shall be able to breathe freely." Who, then, was the woman who would one day take the name of Madame Hérault and assure the future of the whole family?

To this question a secret voice whispered the answer in Hélène's ear.

"It will be you," it said. "You have only to determine, and your life will be changed. Perhaps you would be happier if you remained poor, but the combat of life calls you to this post, and you cannot refuse to perform your duty. It is you who will be the protection of this house, who will defend and save it. The task will not be accomplished without cruel suffering and bitter tears. But it is your duty, it will be to your credit to undertake it and it will be your pride when it is finished."

Hélène trembled. It seemed as if an invisible being were beside her, counselling and encouraging her. Distinctly she heard the word pronounced which seemed her motto: "Will! Will!" She glanced nervously around, and it was only when she saw she was alone in her room with old Madame Hérault that she understood it was her own heart which had spoken to her.

"Well, my dear child," said the old lady kindly, "you have been meditating for the last five minutes, and your

thoughts were a long way away from me, were they not? I will not take advantage of your good nature and tire you with my presence, but will you let me go away without giving me the slightest hope?"

A bright smile lighted up Hélène's pretty face as she held out her hand to Madame Hérault.

"Leave me the work you brought me," she said; "from to-day I shall devote myself to it entirely. My needle and my thoughts will work together, and each stitch will seem to bind me closer to you. But, while I am arriving at a decision, consult your family on your plan, for, if I enter your household, it shall not be as an intruder, and I will meet only friendly looks and outstretched hands. When I have finished this embroidery I will bring it to you, and, if you have not changed your mind, if my decision agrees with yours, we will begin to talk about the future."

Madame Hérault gravely bowed her head in approval, then, placing her arm around the young girl's waist, she affectionately kissed her and said in a trembling voice—

"Work quickly, so as not to keep me too long in suspense."

Then, accompanied to the outer door by Mademoiselle de Graville, she took her leave.

That very morning, when Louis came down to lunch, looking pale and out of spirits, Madame Hérault enthusiastically described her visit. He listened in silence, hardly hearing what she said. His thoughts were far away from the Faubourg Poissonnière, for he could not keep them from wandering to a certain house in the Avenue Gabriel. He saw a smooth-faced man silently enter a room on the first floor in whose window shone a light. A woman, in a

dainty *déshabillé*, welcomed him with a smile, and taking her in his arms he pressed her to his breast. By the soft light of the lamp, Louis could see the wealth of golden hair half covering the exquisite shoulders, the lovely face animated by a rapturous smile, and the irresistible charm in the glance of the azure eyes. And it was the same sea of gold which had enveloped him in its perfumed waves, the same smile which had bewitched him, and the same glance which had thrilled his very soul. He had encircled these shoulders with his arm, the red lips had been pressed to his mouth. Then, how came this man there? And what infamous deception must this woman practise—this woman of whom he could not even yet think without a quiver of love!

Madame Hérault, mistaking her grandson's pre-occupation for attention, continued her narrative—

“I have asked her to come and live with me and never leave me again. I hope you will not disapprove of the arrangement, should she accept?”

He attached no more importance to the question than if they had been discussing the engagement of a lady companion, and replied—

“I am ready to agree to anything which will give you pleasure, grandmother.”

Madame Hérault gleefully clapped her hands and kissed her grandson.

“That is very nice of you indeed!” she exclaimed, “I was afraid you might not like the introduction of a stranger—”

He shook his head, and again gave way to his gloomy thoughts. After lunch he went up to his own rooms, which occupied the whole second floor of the mansion, and

passed two hours stretched on a couch in the smoking-room, trying to benumb his brain with opiated cigarettes, without arriving at any other result than that of stimulating his imagination. The exasperating, voluptuous image of this adorable, golden-haired woman in the arms of her nocturnal visitor was constantly before his eyes, and he groaned with anger and jealousy as he thought of the happiness enjoyed by the detestable Lereboulley. In his excitement his mind gave birth to ideas that were mad and impracticable.

"I am young and I am as rich as he is," he thought, "and why should she not be mine? If she wants money she can have it. No doubt she would play over again the abominable comedy of which I was the dupe last night; she is quite ready to do so, for she expects to see me to-day, at this very hour. She would not hesitate to tell Lereboulley a falsehood for me, and she would tell me falsehoods for others!"

He burst into a mirthless laugh, and striking a little table with such force that he broke it—

"Her smile, her glance, her golden hair are at the disposal of the highest bidder!" he exclaimed. "No, then! I will not have them! A hundred times no! A thousand times no! I will not be duped and ridiculed by her! She shall laugh at me with no one!"

He was now pacing the room, and as he passed the mantlepiece he stopped to look at the clock and saw it was four o'clock. He rang for his servant, ordered his carriage and dressed himself. At five o'clock he went out and drove to the Cercle Impérial, where he was nearly sure of meeting Lereboulley and Thauziat, and where he was within a hundred yards of Lady Olifaunt's house, for in vain had he

sworn to think of Diana no more, he came where he could meet her lover, and lay in wait almost at the corner of her abode.

It was a beautiful day; the sun and warmth had attracted an enormous throng to the Champs-Élysées, and the Rue Royale was crowded with pedestrians hastening to enjoy the spring afternoon. The rooms of the club were almost empty, the card-tables all but deserted, for most of the members were in the garden which, in the form of a terrace, overlooks the whole of the Place de la Concorde and makes of this little corner one of the most agreeable observatories in Paris. There, there was a red and white striped tent, filled with easy chairs which were nearly all occupied by men who were talking and smoking. The air was filled with the fresh smell of leaves and flowers, the tent formed a shelter from the oblique rays of the setting sun, and there was a delicious sense of comfort to rest the nerves and calm the thought.

Louis threaded his way through the groups with a shake of the hand here and a nod there, towards the stone balustrade which runs along the side of the terrace, and there leant, watching, with unseeing eyes, the carriages which were going towards the Bois while he smoked one cigarette after another, unable to think and only conscious of a feeling of utter bitterness in the depths of his heart. He had been there about half-an-hour when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and turning round he saw before him Lereboulley, his face beaming with smiles. A footman brought a garden seat for the senator, and the big man dropped heavily into it and wiped his forehead on which the drops of perspiration were standing out.

"It's tremendously hot," he said. "I've been walking in obedience to my doctor's orders, and, although I have on light things, I am all in a perspiration."

Louis looked at Lereboulley. Emilie's father was dressed with all the care of a lady-killer. Under the coat which fitted tightly to his huge figure he wore a white piqué waist-coat, and his enormous legs were encased in light grey trousers, between which and his patent leather shoes could be seen silk socks embroidered with little flowers. A blue necktie with white spots was negligently knotted beneath his triple chin, and on his head was a white hat with a black band. As he sat he rested both hands on the finely chased gold knob of his cane.

"Have you seen Thauziat to-day?" he asked, lighting a cigar.

"No," answered Louis.

"I have been talking to him a long while this morning," continued the senator, "about a big affair they want me to go into, and on which I wanted his opinion. You know how clear-sighted he is; when he has thoroughly studied a project and thinks it practicable, one can embark upon it without any hesitation. I never met anyone who sees through things so well as that fellow. Now, as the speculation in question is considerable and complicated—"

"How does all this concern me?" interrupted Louis abruptly, as he heard the man he would have liked to strangle calmly talking business to him.

"How? Why, in every way! You and I have some interests in common, my dear fellow, and these interests would be seriously involved. I cannot conclude anything without you—"

"I am not in the humour to discuss anything of moment just now," said Louis roughly.

"Still, I daresay you will do me the favour of listening to me. The plan is likely to turn out a perfect gold-mine, thanks to which you will be able to repair the breaches you have made in your fortune. In short, the idea is to establish a transatlantic cable between France and America, so that we should no longer have to pay the English for the use of theirs. A large American company is being formed, and we are to form the French company, guarantee the capital for the working of the scheme and provide the cable. That is where you come in, with the factory at Saint-Denis to contribute to the materialistic part of the plan. Set going the copper-beaters and wire-drawers! There's work to be done."

"Very well! I will have an estimate prepared at the office."

Lereboulley looked up and carefully examined the young man with his piercing eyes.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked. "You are not in your usual form to-day."

"My ^{head} aches—"

"Oh! Oh! Result of last night's ball. Still we went away almost at the same time and you see I am as fresh and lively as ever, though I am an old man!"

And putting up his eyeglass, he looked complacently at the rose he wore in his buttonhole.

"Perhaps you passed a more enjoyable night than I did," said Louis, with a sarcastic smile.

"What do you mean?" asked Lereboulley, with a touch of uneasiness.

"Nothing which is unlikely," returned Louis. "We all know about your morals, and I wouldn't mind betting you didn't go straight home when you left us this morning."

"I wouldn't take the bet," said Lereboulley, foppishly. "You would be too likely to win it."

"And of course it was a woman in society?" questioned Louis.

"Not only in society, but in the very best society. I do not know if you are the same, but for my part I can't stand *demi-monde* now. In times gone by, I wasn't particular; as long as the woman was pretty I didn't ask for anything else. Then I began to want more. I would have style and education and the appearance of belonging to society. I did not demand the absolute reality—"

"So long as you had a half-caste."

"Now, everything must be authentic. I must be sure that nothing is false—neither name nor position. That is my third style!"

"You should take care, dear boy. Some plated ware is so very like the real silver."

Lereboulley smiled, and answered with an accent of pride—

"Oh, I go upon sure grounds. My silver is hall-marked."

He stopped abruptly. A victoria was rapidly descending the Rue Boissy d'Anglais, drawn by two high-stepping horses. Everything about the equipage was appointed with perfect elegance from the white liveries of the footmen to the red rosettes at the horses' ears and the steel chains which jingled at every step. Attired in a black dress, which set off to perfection the fresh colour of her com-

plexion and her glittering hair, Lady Olifaunt lay back among the cushions, a bright smile upon her face. As they passed beneath the terrace over which the two men were leaning, the coachman slightly drew in his horses as if by a flattering chance, and Louis turned pale at this sudden apparition of the woman who haunted his thoughts and tortured his heart. A frown gathered on his forehead, and, stroking his fair moustache with a nervous hand, he remained leaning on his elbow, while the blood rushed through his veins, his breathing came short and quick, and he longed to insult Diana as he looked at her.

Lereboulley had risen in delight, a look of pride upon his face. He did indeed experience a sensation of immense satisfaction. This beautiful woman, of whom he was so proud, had come to pass before the eyes of her lord and master, and to render him a secret homage. The embodiment of charm, splendour, and brilliance, which was then at his feet, was his; he had only to make a sign and the carriage would stop, he could take his place beside the lovely Diana, and so drive through Paris. But the mystery which surrounded their relations seemed a great deal more charming to him than any public display of his happiness, and he delighted to think of himself as a modern Jupiter visiting in secret a nineteenth century Danaë. The little comedy he had to play gave a peculiar interest to his love. Each time he paid an evening visit to Lady Olifaunt, the perspiration stood on his forehead as he imagined Sir James appearing in a doorway with a revolver in his hand ready to avenge his honour, although he knew that the gentleman lived amidst a luxury of the origin of which he could not be ignorant. But that didn't matter. Diana

had told him that her husband was a man ready to call anyone out at a moment's notice, and he feared him as a burnt child does fire. But for the time being he had nothing to fear, and he could enjoy his triumphant happiness in peace. He was so fascinated by the spectacle before him as he leant over and raised his white hat, that he did not notice that Louis, after just putting his hand to the brim of his hat, turned away his head, and looked studiously in the direction of the garden.

Lady Olifaunt touched the coachman's shoulder with the end of her parasol, and—

“Stop,” she said briefly.

Carelessly leaning with his back against the balustrade, Louis waited, watching Diana's every movement from the corner of his eye. He guessed it was for him she had stopped her carriage and not for Lereboulley, who was puffed up with delight and conceit. He had seen the pleased look which had spread over Lady Olifaunt's face when she saw him with the senator, then her surprise when he had hardly raised his hat to her, and lastly her anger when he seemed determined to pay no attention to her. Sitting perfectly erect, her brows knitted, her lips tightened, she fixed her eyes on him, and with an air of ill-temper—

“Why have you not been to see me to-day?” she asked imperiously.

Louis did not move and made no answer. Lereboulley, after a glance at his silent companion, took the question to himself, and replied in astonishment—

“But was it arranged that you should wait for me, dear madame? Pray forgive me, I had forgotten it.”

"I am not addressing myself to you," returned Diana, with unwonted impertinence ; " but to Monsieur Hérault."

It seemed to Lereboulley that the earth trembled beneath him and that the sky became the colour of lead. He stared at his mistress and his friend with eyes which surprise opened to twice their usual size, and amidst the ringing in his ears he heard the following words exchanged between Lady Olifaunt and Louis—

"It was impossible for me to come," answered the young man at last. "I have been too occupied."

"About something of great importance no doubt? And shall I see you this evening?"

"Not probably."

"To-morrow?"

"I do not think so."

"Never, then?"

"Never."

"Will you explain to me what this conduct signifies?"

"No, madame, it would be useless."

And he bowed and stepped back so that he could not be seen from the Place. He heard Diana give an exclamation of anger, then say—

"Drive on. To the Bois."

And the victoria turned the corner of the avenue and rolled smoothly and swiftly away.

Lereboulley was still in the same place. Thoughts of the most opposite and violent nature were passing through his mind. First he told himself that Diana had deceived him and that she and Hérault had just been shameless enough to break with one another there before him. Then he tried to discover in the past some proof of the intimacy between

Louis and the golden-haired Englishwoman, but he could find none. Then was Lady Olifaunt throwing herself at the young man's head, and was the latter refusing the honour offered him? But if so why did they not conceal their intentions from him? Could they not have had in secret the interview they had had in public? The evening before, at Count Woréseff's ball, Diana had had a long talk with Louis, then why these sudden words, so imperious on her side, so rough on his? And, above all, why had they been spoken in his presence? If Diana had been seeking an excuse and an opportunity for throwing him over, she could not have acted otherwise. And this man who was so decided and clear-sighted in the office at his bank, this large-minded, liberal politician became weak as a child in the hands of the woman he loved.

He went up to Louis who had found a chair and was smoking in silence, and said with entreaty in both look and voice—

“My dear fellow, pray tell me what is going on, and the cause of this sudden quarrel between Lady Olifaunt and yourself? Why her persistence and your rudeness?”

Louis raised his head and quietly replied, for his anger had entirely vanished—

“Forgive me, but by what right do you demand an explanation from me? I do not think Lady Olifaunt's secrets can concern you. You are not her husband, as far as I know, and, unless you are her lover—”

“Louis!” exclaimed Lereboulley, holding out his hands in a gesture of supplication. “Louis, do not speak so lightly of a woman's honour!”

“I was not speaking of anything at all,” answered

Hérault. "It was you who were questioning me, and on matters of the utmost delicacy. I am ready to reply to your questions, but only on the condition that you show me you have some right to ask them. You are neither her husband nor her lover, then who are you? And why do you question me?"

For a moment the senator was undecided what to respond. Then summoning up his courage, he said with many hesitations and repetitions:

"I am particularly interested in the woman with whom you just now exchanged such strange words. You must know that I have promised to watch over her, and I fulfil this duty with a devoted and affectionate care. Do not begin to imagine things which do not exist. Suppose, for instance, that she is my ward—yes, my ward! Then have I not the right to ask you why you refused when she asked you to visit her? What secret tie is there between you? I entreat you to answer me. Do so even if I have not convinced you of my right to question you. Do so for the sake of our long friendship."

Louis felt sorry for Lereboulley as he saw him thus tortured, with his hands trembling, his forehead bathed in perspiration and lips hardly able to articulate his words.

"This is to what that creature can reduce the most energetic and clever men," he thought. "Simply to beings devoid of pride or courage. Should I have been the same? Would she have made me her slave, as she has made this man? It is only by good luck that I have escaped her, for I was already losing both my senses and my heart, and if she had been mine what should I have become, and how great would have been her power over me!"

"Well, then, my dear Lereboulley," he said calmly, "there is a little quarrel between Lady Olifaunt and myself. Yesterday evening, at Count Woréseff's, she treated me with a coolness which vexed me a good deal, and I let her see my displeasure. That roused her anger and she commanded me, as if she were a queen, to go to her house to-day to apologise. As I did not think I owed her any apology, I did not obey her command, and thence her resentment."

The senator's face cleared.

"And is that all?" he asked. "You are not deceiving me? Lady Olifaunt is a very pretty and very seductive woman, and every man in society has hung, is hanging, or will hang around her. I have watched all their tactics, but never have I seen Diana so put out. To-day I saw something in her face, her attitude, her words, which was quite new to me. Come, Louis, on your word of honour, you are not her lover?"

All his anxiety had returned as he enumerated the reasons for his suspicions, and his last words sounded almost like a prayer. Louis tried to reassure him completely.

"Upon my honour, I am not, and have not been her lover."

"Ah! my dear boy!"

The senator took the young man in his arms, and pressed him to his heart in a transport of gratitude. Louis disengaged himself, with a laugh, and looking at the old man;

"I say, Lereboulley," he said, "could you say the same?"

The question was so unexpected that the senator was thoroughly taken aback. He started and changed colour, looked round to see that no one was within earshot, and then indignantly protested :

“What can you be thinking of? After what I have told you, could you suppose—”

“That is just what I could do, after what you have told me.”

“No, no. I should be exceedingly grieved if I thought you imagined——Heavens! One must know how to respect a woman’s reputation.”

“Yes, you have a great respect for it, haven’t you, when you go in at her garden door at three o’clock in the morning to pay her a visit.”

Lereboulley was stupefied.

“What? I?” he whispered.

“Yes, you, this very night, after you left Woréseff’s house. Thauziat and I were walking down the Champs Elysées, and you were on in front of us, strutting along with the air of a vanquisher. We saw you go into a house in the Avenue—”

“Hush!” interrupted the senator. “It wasn’t for what you believe—”

“Then what was it for? Were you going to talk to Sir James?”

“Devil take the boy! Don’t mention any names, I implore you; think what a serious matter it is. If anyone suspected—”

“Why, half Paris does suspect it, and the other half is sure of it!”

Lereboulley frowned.

"I do not believe what you are telling me, and I should be very much annoyed if I did think it was true. But, since you caught me in the act, I am forced to own up to you—Thauziat knew all about it a long while ago. You see what discretion and care I employ, but then a woman who is really in society is in question. The best people go to her house and she is invited everywhere. She is so charming. I have known dozens of women, but I have never met her equal. You see, my boy, I know how to appreciate happiness when I find it. I am an old warrior in love's army, and Diana is my marshall's *bâton*."

"It must have cost you very dear to get it, and more to keep it."

"But she has money of her own!" cried Lereboulley. "She has estates in America, which she inherited from her father, on which there are mines."

"Yes, one can always understand that Diana has gold-mines to dip into, as your daughter says."

The senator's face clouded.

"There you touch on one of the most painful points of my position. My daughter detests Lady Olifaunt, and her behaviour towards her causes me much annoyance. You know how dearly I love Emilie—I have never married again solely on her account—but I think she ought to understand that there are certain things in the life of a father, who after all is free to do as he likes, to which she ought to close her eyes."

"You cannot expect her to be like a sister to Lady Olifaunt."

"No, but I could expect her not to use her sarcasm against her as she does. I no longer dare invite Diana and

her husband to my house, for I am trembling all the time for fear of what my daughter might say. Sir James is a terrible man, and it is no laughing matter with him when his honour is in question. Besides he is a splendid shot."

Louis began to laugh—

"I am a better shot than he is. If ever he seeks a quarrel with you, send him to me."

"The devil! No!" cried Lereboulley. "Then there would be something else to be considered—I should have to marry his widow!"

They were both very merry by this time, for the senator was delighted at being able to parade his happiness without having to reproach himself with indiscretion, and Louis, with the inconsistency of his nature, was already congratulating himself on having avoided an intrigue, which, he vaguely foresaw, would have been fraught with dangers and embarrassment.

The setting sun was crimsoning the avenue with its last rays, and the carriages returning to Paris formed one continual stream. The terrace was now deserted and the two men went indoors, Lereboulley leaning familiarly on Louis' arm. As they entered they met Thauziat, who could not repress a movement of surprise at seeing them thus arm in arm and cast a questioning glance at Louis.

"Now we have met Clément, let us all three go to Lady Olifaunt's to dinner," said Lereboulley to Louis, as if he wished to satisfy Thauziat's curiosity himself. "She will be delighted to see us, and I will make peace between you. It will pain me if you remain at variance; one must always be on good terms with a pretty woman. After dinner we can talk about the cable; is it agreed?"

"No. Thauziat and I are not free. We are engaged for this evening."

"Ah, you bear malice, Louis," said the senator shaking his head. "That isn't right."

Then he shook hands with the two young men and went off.

"Why didn't you do as he proposed, when he seemed so set upon it?" said Thauziat to his friend.

"Because what I have learned since yesterday has quite changed my opinions, and I do not wish to have anything to do with Diana."

Clément looked hard at Louis and saw that he was quite calm and unmoved.

"Ah? So much the better," he replied. "She isn't the woman for you."

They dined, went to the *Ambassadeurs*, found pleasure in listening to a few stupid songs and, towards midnight, returned to the club, where they commenced playing for heavy stakes. At one o'clock, Thauziat went home leaving Louis winning everything he ventured, and at three o'clock the heir to the house of Hérault returned to the Faubourg Poissonnière, heavy-headed though not sad-hearted, and the gainer of two thousand louis.

For a whole week he led a life calculated to completely change the course of his thoughts, and to turn them from the beautiful Englishwoman. He took care never to be alone, so as to have no leisure for thinking of her whom he was not yet quite sure he no longer loved. He rose late, lunched with Thauziat, went to races, dined at the club and then played the greater part of the night. He only left the card-table when thoroughly overcome by fatigue,

and thus assured himself a heavy, dreamless sleep. For seven days he lived thus away from his home, and all that time his grandmother did not see him once. But at the end of the week, his conscience pricked him as he thought of how he had left the poor old woman alone. It happened to be Monday, an evening on which Emilie never came to dine with Madame Hérault, as it was her father's "at home" day, so Louis knew there would be no one to speak to him about Diana. He reached home at seven o'clock, and went straight into the drawing-room. The lamps had not yet been lighted and the heavy curtains left the large room in semi-darkness. He saw a woman seated with her back towards him at the little table, surrounded by a screen, at which Madame Hérault always worked, and without waiting to see more he went up to her, and said gaily :

"Good evening, grandmother."

But, as soon as the words had left his lips, he uttered an exclamation of surprise. The woman had risen in graceful confusion, and, instead of a wrinkled face and bent shoulders, presented to his gaze a youthful countenance and charming figure.

"I beg your pardon," he said, bowing. "Pray excuse my stupidity and do not let me disturb you."

The girl he was addressing made a slight sign with her hand, as if to signify that there was no need for any further apology, and, with a slight inclination of her head, she was about to leave the room, when Madame Hérault, preceding a servant carrying lights, opened the drawing-room door—

"Ah, is it you, my dear child?" she cried, hastening towards her grandson. "How good of you to come!"

And not one word of reproach for his prolonged absence

did Louis receive, only kisses and looks expressive of delight.

When she had recovered from the surprise her grandson's appearance had caused her, the old lady noticed the slight embarrassment of the two young people, and clasping her withered hands together,

"How stupid of me!" she said. "I had forgotten. You do not know Mademoiselle H  l  ne, and you, my dear, do not know my grandson;" and drawing up her little figure, she continued ceremoniously:

"Mademoiselle, my grandson, Louis H  rault-Gandon; my child, Mademoiselle H  l  ne de Graville."

In an instant, all the events of the previous week returned to Louis' memory. He remembered the young girl Thauziat and he had followed to the house, the questions he had put to old Anselme and Madame H  rault's emotion when she heard this name Graville, which recalled so vividly the bygone days. He heard his grandmother telling about her visit to H  l  ne, and, all fluttered by the joy of her discovery, asking his permission to offer a home to the descendant of her benefactors. In the hurry and bustle of his life during the past few days he had forgotten the episode, and now he suddenly saw before him the heroine of it all. The frankness of her glance, the serious firmness of her mouth, the bright intelligence of her brow all pleased him. Her dark complexion gave her a somewhat sombre, melancholy air, and in every way she formed the most complete contrast to the delicacy, the brightness, and the fairness of Diana. Her severe grace charmed him from the first moment, and he set her down as a quiet, thoughtful, agreeable girl, in whose society he should find much

pleasure. He bent towards her, and, holding out his hand with courteous friendliness, said :

“You are very welcome, mademoiselle, and you must permit me to thank you for the kindness you have shown in acceding to my grandmother’s wishes. You have my sincere gratitude for so doing, and I hope you will consider this house as your home.”

Hélène bowed her head, with a smile which displayed her white teeth, placed her hand in the young man’s and answered in her low-pitched voice, which to Louis’ ears sounded at once serious and musical—

“Thank you very much for your kind reception. I promise you I will love your grandmother as if she were my own.”

Then they both felt a sudden agitation which made them turn from one another, and they said no more.

Dinner was despatched almost in silence. All three were watching each other. Madame Hérault was trying to discover from Louis’ face the impression Hélène had given him, and Louis was looking at Mademoiselle de Graville, whose attitude was one of perfect tranquillity and correctness. Not a sentence escaped her lips but was natural and full of tact. In one day this girl had again become in Madame Hérault’s house what she had been in her mother’s before their ruin. Her good education protected her from all ridicule, as does a tried coat of mail from every dagger-thrust, and she felt at ease and sure of herself.

She noticed, with sorrow, Louis’ paleness and the dark circles which the late hours he had recently kept had drawn around his eyes. She saw that he was grave and pre-occupied, and she imagined he had some secret trouble,

never dreaming that at this moment the young man's thoughts were occupied solely with herself, and that, with his natural light-heartedness, he had already dismissed from his mind every cause of sorrow and annoyance.

When they returned to the drawing-room, Hélène poured out the coffee without waiting for Madame Hérault to ask her to do so, and the latter, as she sat by her grandson, gave herself up to the pleasure of seeing the sweet-faced girl render her the little, affectionate services of which she had been so often deprived. She was proud of having sought her out, and happy that she had been able to attract her to her home ; it seemed to her that Hélène was in some way her creation, and that some of her charm was reflected on herself. She wished to tell Louis of every accomplishment of her protégée's, and taking from a side-table the piece of China crape which had served as a pretext for her visit to Mademoiselle de Graville, she triumphantly showed it marvellously repaired—

“She embroiders with the fingers of a fairy,” she said, as she handled the bright-coloured material ; “she sings and plays the piano with wonderful taste, and if you only knew how she reads !”

“If she does not dislike the smell of tobacco-smoke,” said Louis, “I shall proclaim her a paragon.”

“Will you allow this bad boy to smoke just one little cigarette, Hélène dear ?” said Madame Hérault to Mademoiselle de Graville, who was sitting at the other side of the room, looking at an illustrated paper.

Hélène rose and brought the little cigar-lighter which was on a table—

“My father always smoked,” she said simply ; “and I do not mind the smell of tobacco in the least.”

She returned to her seat, and only joined in the conversation when Madame Hérault addressed some question or remark to her. The evening passed remarkably quickly and Louis was surprised to find it was eleven o'clock, when to him it seemed as if they had just left table. He said good-night to Mademoiselle de Graville, kissed his grandmother, and, without even thinking of going to the club, went up to his room, undressed and slept as he had not done for weeks.

The next day he lunched with the two ladies and returned to dine with them. For a whole week he did the same, and Madame Hérault, in her delight, thought that with Hélène happiness had again entered the house.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER three days, Clément de Thauziat began to wonder at the disappearance of his friend and to scent a mystery. He was accustomed to Louis' fickleness, but this sudden retreat after so violent a shock announced an important alteration in the young man's ideas. He soon came to the conclusion that Diana's lover had gone in quest of some gallant diversion, and, as he was not curious, he did not trouble to find out what had become of his satellite. He wanted to go to Brussels to look into the working of a company of which Lereboulley and he were directors, so he set off, and, lingering on the way, did not get back to Paris until the end of the week ; then as he had to tell the senator the result of his mission, he went to Lady Olifaunt's at about five o'clock on the day of his return.

The mansion occupied by Diana was a pretty house with its front entrance in the Avenue Gabriel, and the back overlooking the garden whose little door Lereboulley found so easy to open at night. This charming abode, rented at fifty thousand francs a year, had been built for the beautiful Miss Howard when Prince Louis Napoleon was at the Elysée, and within its limited space it contained everything the most luxurious refinement could demand. The whole of the ground-floor was occupied by the reception-rooms, Diana's apartments being on the floor above, while Sir James's were in a wing built at right angles to the other

part of the house. A stone staircase, with a balustrade of porphyry columns and velvet-covered hand-rail and lighted by a hanging lamp of gilded bronze, led from the hall to the gallery on to which the drawing-rooms opened.

The interior had been decorated with exquisite taste. The furniture was elegant though quiet. The old silk hangings of the boudoir, the tapestry from designs by Teniers in the billiard-room, the Louis XIII. Cordovan leather which adorned the dining-room offered a variety of styles in perfect accordance with the particular character each room should have. The bedroom, which was preceded by a Pompadour boudoir where the marvels of the *rocaille* style charmed the eye, was hung with a magnificent heliotrope material woven with silver flowers, the soft colouring of which lent a yet more seductive brilliancy to Diana's complexion. Beside the Renaissance bed—of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl—stood two Italian chests bearing the arms of the Medicis and adorned with gilded bronzes. The chest of drawers was a Venetian coffer, the top of which was a mosaic of coloured stones representing the marriage of the Doge of Venice with the Adriatic. Most of the costly furniture in this strange bedroom had been bought at the sale at the San Donato palace. The chimney-piece, of black carved wood, was ornamented by a kind of reredos in which was enframed the portrait of Lady Olifaunt, painted by Chaplin, in the costume of the hunting Diana, with one breast bare and a silver crescent in her golden hair. The floor was entirely covered by a carpet of white astrachan, as soft and fine as snow.

The mistress of the house generally received her intimate friends in a little Japanese drawing-room which Sir

James had filled with knick-knacks chosen with the taste and knowledge of a connoisseur, and the cabinets held specimens of the most exquisitely carved ivory it is possible to admire—statuettes sculptured with the skill and patience of the wonderful Jeddo artists. In this room, hung with pale-blue silk embroidered with monstrous plants and chimerical animals, Diana was with her friends the evening of Clément's return, attired in a costume to harmonise with her surroundings. Her beautiful hair was drawn up over her forehead and fastened with coral-headed gold pins, while a long rose-coloured tunic with golden flowers, open on the chest, and with sleeves so large that the whole of her bare arms could be seen, fell to her feet, which were shod with green Turkish shoes. The dress was so loose, that at every movement it seemed as though it would slip from her, and served as a wonderful enhancement to her beauty.

It was striking five when the footman opened the door to admit Clément. There were already seven people in the dainty room. Diana was sitting on a couch with the Duc de Pforza, a very rich Italian nobleman, with hair dyed to a greenish-black, and dressed in a long, tight frock-coat in the buttonhole of which he wore a multi-coloured rosette. Near the piano, Mrs Andersen—an American woman with no money, but the possessor of an adorable daughter with fair hair, blue eyes, and the somewhat heavy Yankee chin—was listening to André Wordler, the young musician, who was softly singing a melody he had just written for some of Coppée's verses. In a window stood Sir James holding in his hands a little picture he had bought that day, and of which he was pointing out the beauties, wonderful for the

price—only forty thousand francs, a mere nothing!—to Lereboulley, who looked as sullen as a bull-dog.

Thauziat's entrance tore Lady Olifaunt from the seductions of the aristocratic foreigner, and rescued Lereboulley from Sir James. Diana had always a smile for Clément, and yet, as she saw him come in, she had frowned. Then she advanced to meet him, allowed him to press her hands, and again sank languidly upon the embroidered cushions. Thauziat bowed to the two American ladies, gave a friendly nod to the musician, and going over to Lereboulley—

"Well, my superior officer," he said, "is Sir James showing you some new marvel?"

"You have come just at the right moment, Clément. You, who are such a critic, tell our friend that he has let himself be robbed by that scoundrel of a Steiner. Two thousand louis for a little piece of wood ten inches by eight! You have been robbed, my dear fellow, simply robbed!"

"It is an authentic Carlo Dolci," replied Sir James coldly, looking at the senator severely. "Besides the bargain is concluded. And I may as well warn you the cheque is drawn on your bank."

The thought of the cheque seemed to double Lereboulley's irritation, and he exclaimed angrily—

"I am very much obliged to you for warning me. But you are going at a great pace, Sir James. No fortune can withstand such extravagance."

The Englishman turned crimson, and said with an offended air—

"Excuse me, Lereboulley, but has my wife no longer an account open with you?"

"How you do take offence!" broke in the senator. "I

am only telling you my opinion of your purchase for your own good. Buy what you like ; I have nothing to do with it except to cash your cheques. But it doesn't prevent your picture being a daub ! ”

He took Thauziat's arm and drew him away, muttering furiously—“ A danb ! Nothing but a daub ! ”

The musician was now accompanying the pretty Miss Andersen, who was singing his melody, and as he hummed the air to her he raised his ecstatic eyes to the ceiling :

“ Oh ! The first kiss, under the gauzy veil ! ”

“ ‘ Kiss,’ is the most important word, so linger on it like this : ‘ ki-i-iss,’ and then let the voice die away on ‘ veil.’ Let it die away—die away—that's it ! ”

The old American, who was gormandizing sandwiches and port wine, applauded all alone in her maternal enthusiasm, and murmured through her teeth—

“ Delicious ! Charming ! ”

The Italian prince, who prided himself on being passionately fond of music, had joined the group at the piano, and added his voice to the pretty American's, to whom he was standing as close as he possibly could.

Diana was no longer reclining in her handsome Japanese costume on the couch so inducive to reverie. She drew aside a portière and took Thauziat into the next room, which was a sort of little study where Sir James wrote his letters and settled tradesmen's accounts.

“ We shall not be disturbed here,” she said, seating herself in an arm-chair.

“ Whatever is the matter ? ” asked Clément, with a smile. “ Shutting yourself up in a room alone with me, Diana ? I thought that was a speciality of Sir James's.”

"Do not jest," answered the beautiful Englishwoman, and her eyes looked as bright and hard as steel. "It is out of place, just at this moment."

"Oh! Have you any worries?"

"Only one, but that one is of great importance."

"Can I be of any use in the matter?"

"I believe you can be of every use."

Thauziat glanced at Diana, saw that she was perfectly calm, and became very serious.

"What have you said about me to your friend Hérault?" went on Lady Olifaunt. "I left him with you when I came away from Count Woréseff's, and you both left almost directly after I did, so Lereboulley tells me. Monsieur Hérault was to have come to see me the next day. Not only did he not come, but he has behaved to me in the most impertinent and ungentlemanly manner, and that before others. What has happened? How is it that he, who was so amiable and devoted the evening before, should treat me with such scorn and rudeness the next day? It is you who have brought about this change—it can only be you. But I wish to know why you did so, and by what means."

"Well, but, my dear girl, I think it very strange that you should make me responsible for Louis Hérault's words and deeds. He knows what he is about. He is old enough to know how he ought to behave, and there is no need for me to teach him what to do. Besides, I am astonished to see you so upset about an unpaid visit. Are you forsaken because one solitary man has escaped your toils?"

"But if he is just the one that I wish to have at my feet," broke in Diana, in hard tones.

"Oh! oh!" said Thauziat. "Do you do Louis so much

honour as to make of him the preferred, the almost indispensable adorer? And do you want him so very badly?"

"I want nothing, except a little frankness from you. What have you said to Monsieur Hérault to prevent his coming to see me?"

"Nothing."

Diana started to her feet, and putting her angry countenance close to Thauziat's—

"Why do you tell such a lie?" she asked.

"I never take the trouble to lie to any one," answered Clément, "and why should I to you? I have said nothing to Louis. He is entirely ignorant of all you wish so carefully concealed. But when I saw him so madly in love with you, and knew that he was turning all sorts of wild projects over in his mind—was he not talking of running away with you, and then marrying you after the divorce had been obtained, which was all sheer madness, as you must see for yourself—I tried to bring him back to a more sensible view of the matter, and, my efforts meeting with no success, I simply took him out for a walk in the open air. Now, we happened to walk behind Lereboulley, and that happy man innocently led us to your door—"

"And Louis Hérault saw him come in?"

"Yes."

Diana was silent, and her hands trembled slightly as they played with the silken tassels of her waist-band. About her rosy mouth, which was disfigured by a malicious smile, was an expression of crafty ferociousness, and her eyes gleamed darkly beneath her contracted brows.

"What interest have you in wresting him from me?" she asked, after a moment. "You have never been a stupid,

cowardly man who does harm for the mere pleasure of causing some one to suffer, and you would not do me a bad turn unless you had a good reason for doing so."

"You are aware that I have a great weakness for you, Diana, but take my advice, and think no more of Louis. I have undertaken not to let him pass into your white hands, and there is the solution of the mystery. Pluck Lereboulley as much as you like; he is a tough old bird, and can defend himself. But have mercy upon this poor boy, who thinks himself a *roué*, and is innocence itself."

The handsome English woman suddenly raised her eyes, which she had kept fixed on the ground, and letting Clément see them in all their luminous brightness—

"And supposing I loved him?" she cried.

"Do not talk about anything so unlikely," returned Thauziat, coldly. "My dear child, you have never loved anything or anybody in this world besides Diana, and in that respect you have acted very wisely, for the said Diana is a little personage who will never betray you, and who will never give you cause for anything but satisfaction. Men are fools, you know! They are not worth troubling about."

"But I had a caprice for this one."

"It will pass."

"Thauziat, I am vainly seeking the motives which are guiding you, but I am sure there is a woman's hand in all this."

"Perhaps there is."

"One of these days you will find yourself Louis Hérault's rival in some love affair—you are bound to do so—and then you will quarrel."

Clément began to laugh—

"When that happens, I will give him up to you, Diana, as my revenge."

"That's a bargain," she replied, shaking his hand.

"What an enchantress you are," he said, as he held the white hand for a moment in his own.

He kissed the rosy-tipped fingers; then, as he saw her arm was devoid of ornaments—

"Don't you wear any bracelets now?" he asked. "And yet I know you have some magnificent ones."

"I don't like anything but pearls now—large black ones—and they are too expensive for my purse."

"Will you allow me to send you some?"

"And while you are about it, Thauziat, mind you send me the one your friend has discovered, and to whom he is making such violent love in his grandmother's house," she replied, with a mocking air.

"He never meets anyone but Emilie Lereboulley at his grandmother's."

"No, no! He never turned his thoughts to that saffron-skinned deformity," said Diana, irritably. "It is some one else, quite fresh, who is in question. Was it because this other love affair found favour in your eyes that you prevented him from coming here?"

"This is the first I have heard of any love affair. I haven't seen Louis for a week."

"Well, then, go and assist at the spectacle, it ought to be very interesting. And then you can tell me all about it."

"You may be sure I shall do that!"

They returned to the drawing-room, where Sir James had begun to play piquet with Lereboulley. The Italian was flirting with Miss Andersen, whose mother was still eating cakes regardless of the composer's stare of amazement.

It was not long before Thauziat took leave and retired. Once out of the house, he turned his steps towards the club, meditating as he went. Diana's words had left their impression on his mind. Amongst his other qualities, good, bad, or indifferent, he could reckon that of an excellent memory, which stored away a record of the smallest events. In an instant Lady Olifaunt's treacherous insinuation had brought to his mind the young girl Louis and he had followed and Madame Hérault's reminiscences when she heard this name Graville, which reminded her of the village where she was born. Again there appeared to Thauziat's eyes, clearly and well defined, the silhouette of the girl, who, for half-an-hour, had excited his curiosity, stimulated his desire and enfevered his usually tranquil brain. Could she be the girl who was now living with Madame Hérault?

And why had Louis been so careful not to tell him of the strange ending to their adventure? He suspected his friend of a little perfidy. After all it was he, Thauziat, who had first remarked the girl, who was walking quietly along, with nothing about her to attract attention save her natural elegance and quiet grace. It was he who had induced Louis to follow her—oh! without any thought of making a conquest, simply for the pleasure of watching her walk—it was he who had caused the interrogation of old Anselme, and it was he who had put all in proper train for the providential discovery of Hélène—yes, Hélène, he remembered even her name. In his mind, he could see her profile under the veil, as he saw it that day; he could see her determined chin, her proud mouth, and the undulations of her figure when she hastened her steps to distance

her pursuers. Would Louis' careless eyes have ever picked out a woman from the crowd, and, even if he had noticed her, would he have ever had the energy to follow her? No! The episode was entirely owing to Clément, and he felt a sort of proprietary right to the young girl; she was in some measure his creation.

Already his brain was becoming heated, already he was giving rein to his imagination. But he quickly recalled himself to his senses, as he suddenly thought how hastily he was forming his opinion, and how little dependence was to be placed on Diana's tale, and he began to laugh at his own precipitation. Still, he felt a certain secret pleasure at this sudden effervescence which had carried away his judgment, for in it he saw a proof that his youth was not yet quite gone. Then he calmly analysed his sensations, and found that he had been more seriously preoccupied than he had thought. He had a dull feeling of irritation within him, and although he had no intentions regarding this girl himself yet he looked upon Louis as supplanting him.

Accustomed to direct young Hérault, and to see him always give way to him, as to his lord and master, he suspected his vassal of a movement of revolt against his authority, and the attempt at emancipation wounded him deeply. If Louis had taken a fancy to the girl, he certainly would not try to draw her away from him—every one knew his principles in gallant affairs. But if ever his *amour-propre* was at stake, if anyone tried to distance or to conquer him, then his desire for battle and triumph was aroused, and woe to those who barred his path!

He moved his hand in a gesture of menace, and this

time, when he noticed the direction of his thoughts, he did not laugh. On the contrary, he remained very grave, and promised himself to bring all this intrigue to light at once. When he had finished his dinner at the club, he strolled through the different rooms, watched for a moment a game of billiards which had just begun, came to the conclusion that the two adversaries were bad players, and then, yielding to an inward excitement which forbade him to stay long in one place, left the club, and went to the Faubourg Poissonnière.

When he reached the Héraults' house, instead of letting him go upstairs as usual, the footman opened a little door under the staircase, and led the way into the garden.

It had been a very hot day, and after dinner Madame Hérault finding the drawing-room intolerably close, had taken her grandson's arm, and letting Emilie, who had come to dinner, pass before her with Mademoiselle de Graville, had gone to sit on the lawn near the garden steps. It was nine o'clock and nearly night, but the sky was so clear that surrounding objects could be quite clearly distinguished. A delicious odour of freshness was exhaled by the carefully watered lawns, and the flowers in the vases, refreshed by the soft, cool breeze, scattered their exquisite perfumes on the air. The pretty garden was enwrapped in a deep calm, and hardly could the far-away murmur of voices, or the faint sound of carriage-wheels in the distance serve as a reminder that this oasis was in the very heart of Paris. Under the influence of the sweet quiet all four were silent, until Louis took out a cigar and proceeded to light it. Then Madame Hérault, who allowed her grandson to smoke in every room of the house, protested.

"You will poison us with your horrid tobacco."

"Well, that is consistent," answered Louis. "You don't mind me smoking in the drawing-room, and yet you forbid it out of doors."

"The flowers are perfuming the air all around us this evening, and you are going to spoil it all."

"Oh, grandmother, so you are taking up horticulture again! By the way, does Mademoiselle de Graville like flowers? Have you that innocent but all-absorbing passion, mademoiselle?"

"Mademoiselle de Graville does love flowers," answered Madame Hérault, "and she knows a great deal more about them than I do. She has shown me some alterations which ought to be made in the arrangement of the hothouse, which are very ingenious and very simple."

"That is how they were at my father's, at Graville," said Hélène.

"Then, if you have found some one to help you, grandmother, we will exhibit next year. Let me see: Orchids—Madame Hérault, gold medal. That sounds well, doesn't it. But, since you don't like my cigar, I am going for a stroll in the garden; will you come with me, Emilie?"

Mademoiselle Lereboulley rose, and they slowly disappeared behind a clump of trees. A moment afterwards Madame Hérault heard the sound of a step on the gravel path, and turning round—

"Why, here is Monsieur de Thauziat!" she exclaimed.

At these words Hélène started. She had heard this name pronounced very often during the past week, and she knew it was that of Louis' most intimate friend. She experienced a sudden sensation of dread, as though some

danger were at hand, which prevented her raising her eyes, but she heard a sonorous voice saying—

“Good evening, madame; are you quite well? Has Louis left you alone this evening?”

“He is walking round the garden with Emilie Lereboulley. But, as you see, I am not alone; I never am now. I have an adopted daughter, to whom I must present you. My dear child, this is Monsieur de Thauziat, one of our dearest friends.”

Hélène rose, and as she looked at the visitor she recognised the dark, proud face of the man who was with Louis the day they had first seen each other. She had guessed it was he before she raised her eyes, for he was the only man whose presence could cause her such violent agitation. The imperious vibration of his voice, made to command, the determination of his glance, which would be obeyed, the decision of his somewhat scornful manner, all betokened an exceptional man who was bound to leave, whether for good or for evil, his impression wherever he chose to go.

“Mademoiselle Hélène de Graville, my dear Clément,” continued Madame Hérault, concluding the introduction.

He bowed with courtly and respectful grace, as if he were at the feet of some princess of blood royal, and said in a voice which was almost a caress, so soft and gentle was it:

“Henceforth I shall not have so heavy a burden upon my conscience when I deprive you of Louis, madame, for I shall know that the void caused by his absence will be as well filled as if he were with you.”

Hélène made no response save by a cold inclination of the

head. In no way did Clément overstep the bounds of the strictest propriety, and yet Mademoiselle de Graville felt as if he had whispered words of love in her ear. In every tone and inflection of his voice, in his every attitude she found something which left its impression on her. Fate had decreed that everyone with whom this man came in contact must either hate or adore him; it was useless to dream of escaping his influence.

From the first minute, Hélène's perception of this fatality was clear and decided. She was not deceived in her opinion of Clément; she knew that he would work her either much good or irreparable harm, but which of the two it would be she did not know, and it would have been impossible for her to foresee.

She ventured to look at him while he was talking to Madame Hérault. She could discover no indication of wickedness in his face. His forehead was broad and intellectual, his eyes bright and dark, his teeth were white and even, and there was an air of strength and gaiety about him. The only sign of hard-heartedness lay in the slightly aquiline nose, but, after all, that might as probably betoken pride as cruelty, and the intonations of his voice were sometimes irresistibly sweet and caressing. She drew a mental comparison between Louis, with his fair hair, his blue eyes, his slight figure, his womanish voice and indecision of character, and this strong determined dark-skinned man, and the difference seemed like that between a dove and a vulture. What resistance could the former offer to the latter? Was he not destined to be his prey?

As this thought passed through her mind, Louis and

Emilie came back. The young man recognised his friend some way off, and cried—

“Ah, Clément, is that you?”

But he did not hasten his steps, and it seemed as though he was loath to approach the group. Mademoiselle Lereboulley, on the contrary, advanced with hand outstretched to Thauziat, her eyes shining, her lips smiling—

“You have kept your promise,” she said; “thank you.”

“For what are you thanking him?” asked Louis.

“For a little service he has rendered me.”

“Ah, Thauziat is rendering you services, is he? Beware, he does not do anything for nothing.”

“Let him ask me what he will,” answered Emilie seriously, “it can never be as much as what I have already offered him.”

And passing before the two men, she seated herself between Hélène and Madame Hérault. Louis and Thauziat remained standing face to face.

“What have you been doing all the centuries since I last saw you?” asked Clément. “Have you turned hermit?”

“I am not old enough yet to do that!”

“Then have you been kept prisoner by that young lady’s attractions?” and, with an ironic movement of his head, Thauziat designated Mademoiselle de Graville.

Louis’ heart beat quickly. He felt that his friend was more in earnest than he wished to show, and that his question demanded a frank reply. He thought for a moment of answering, “Yes, I like her, and I should esteem myself happy if I could make her love me.” Then he was restrained by the memory of the young girl’s more

than modest position, and he did not desire to reveal the lively interest with which she had already inspired him. He feared his friend's ridicule, and at the same time he was a little jealous. He remembered Thauziat's admiration the first time he had seen Hélène, and his determined pursuit. He thought it prudent not to attract his attention and he did not make his confession.

"What?" he replied, in affected disdain. "That little companion! Good heavens, no! I have never understood how a man can have a love affair in his own house; it is too great a nuisance. When the break comes, the fellow daren't go home unless he turns the woman out, and if he does that he seems a hard-hearted brute, and I am too sensitive, I don't like hurting anyone. Do you like the look of her?"

"Very much indeed; and since no one else is laying siege—"

"But, Clément, she is beneath my grandmother's roof."

"Make yourself easy, I shall respect your house."

"And she is of good family."

"Then I can marry her," retorted Thauziat, laughing. Then becoming grave once more, and fixing his eyes on Louis'—

"You are very moral to-day. Have you any second thoughts? If so, say so."

"None whatever."

Twice had Thauziat intentionally given Hérault an opportunity for speaking. Twice had the latter recoiled before the necessity of making a confession to his friend. In five minutes he had sown the seed of the cruel regrets he was to suffer in after days.

They both went over to the three ladies and began to talk, while the darkness deepened around them. Emilie, at first silent, became gradually animated, and her wit gave forth fiery sparks as it encountered Thauziat's. The repartee of both was as brilliant as if they had had an audience of a hundred persons to encourage them with their plaudits. It seemed as if Clément wished to display his intellectual powers, and as if Emilie, happy at the similarity of ideas between herself and him, was taking delight in providing him with themes on which to base his variations.

Madame Hérault, Hélène and Louis sat listening to them until eleven o'clock, unmindful of the increasing freshness of the night and the deepening silence of the town. It was only when Louis suddenly exclaimed, "Why, it is nearly midnight!" that the spell was broken. Then Madame Hérault slowly rose, and all went into the house. They stayed for a moment in the hall, while Emilie, with the aid of her maid, who was awaiting her, put on her cloak.

"What a delightful evening we have passed!" said the old grandmother.

"And one which we could often enjoy," added Emilie, "if only Monsieur de Thauziat would give us his society."

Thauziat smiled, but made no answer, not wishing to show too much eagerness to accept this invitation. He bowed to Madame Hérault and Mademoiselle de Graville, pressed Louis' hand, and turning to Mademoiselle Lereboulley—

"I will see you to your carriage," he said.

They went out together, and the other three watched them go off.

“What a charming man Clément is,” said Madame Hérault. “To see and hear him this evening, who would have imagined he is such a scamp? For he is a scamp, Hélène, my dear. How unaffected and nice he has been these last two hours! I must say I adore him, and I hope he will soon come again.”

“Don’t buoy yourself up with that hope too much, grandmother,” said Louis. “Thauziat is a man who excels in the art of making himself regretted. He has put himself out for you this evening, but you won’t see him again for a fortnight, at least.”

In his heart Louis hoped it would be as he said. But he was doomed to disappointment. The next day but one Thauziat called again, and, as if his habits had experienced as complete a transformation as those of his friend, seemed to take a real pleasure in quiet, family society. He had always been treated by Madame Hérault as one of the family, and, besides, his intimacy with Louis furnished a pretext for his frequent visits; still it might have been observed that he only came at the hours when he was sure to find Mademoiselle de Graville with Madame Hérault. He lulled Hélène’s prejudices to sleep, did not arouse Madame Hérault’s suspicions and almost managed to impose upon Louis.

“After all, Clément has proved his affection for me,” said the latter to himself; “and why should he not really come here only to see me?”

Emilie, with her greater penetration, had had a truer idea of Clément’s designs than anybody from the very first, though the state of Thauziat’s mind was, in truth, complicated enough; but there is no analysis more

delicate than that of a suffering woman striving to ascertain the causes of her pain.

Clément had first gone to see Mademoiselle de Graville out of sheer curiosity. He wanted to know what this girl was like, and, hurt by Louis' hypocritical silence, he had promised himself to have his revenge by inflicting a little anxiety upon his friend. Then he had become interested himself, and Hélène's fascination had completed the defeat of this hitherto victorious warrior.

That she had conquered him there could be no question. He took pleasure in being near her, even if he could not speak to her, and he was quite willing to pass a whole evening at the Héraults' house playing *bésique* with the grandmother, simply to be able to look at the young girl, as she sat by the table sewing, with her eyes bent upon her work. He found a new and great delight only in breathing the same air as she did, and he never stopped to ask himself whither this incline, which he was so rapidly descending, would lead him. All he knew or cared about was that he found a pleasure in following this path, which exceeded any he had found hitherto. He studied every means of entering into Hélène's confidence, and, whenever he had the opportunity, would talk to her of her birthplace, her family and the precarious existence she had so bravely borne. He called to his aid words of infinite delicacy to make her feel and understand the admiration he had for her, and it was strangely interesting to watch this *blasé* who found his heart again imbued with pure and tender sentiments.

Emilie had followed, not without melancholy, Clément's tactics; she measured with great accuracy the successive

advances he made along this path of love, and it increased the esteem in which she had held Mademoiselle de Graville from the commencement of their acquaintance, to see how indifferent she remained to Clément's peculiarly flattering attentions. Had she been in Hélène's place, would she not have gladly responded to the advances of this seductive lover? And who, besides this girl, could have worn an expression of so serene a dignity? Who else would have exhibited so much cool politeness and amiable reserve? Sometimes her demeanour was so calm and self-possessed as to lead to the impression that she was not even conscious of the attentive care of which she was the object, and Emilie resolved to skilfully sound this heart which kept so admirably the secret of its feelings.

When Hélène had been installed with Madame Hérault, she was treated exactly as if she had been the old lady's daughter. A maid had been provided for her service, and presents of all sorts had been showered upon her. She had hardly anything to wear, when she had yielded to Madame Hérault's entreaties, so Emilie had been commissioned to go shopping with her, and the two girls soon became intimate. Lereboulley, on his side, had received his daughter's new friend very graciously and had invited her to his house, an invitation which Hélène had accepted. She wondered at Emilie's eccentricity, but liked her nature which was essentially good beneath the sarcastic exterior. She understood the bitterness which lay on the surface of this exceptional character, and knew how to seek and find the treasures of affection which lay beneath, like pearls hidden by the raging waves. Seeing that she was delicate and unhappy, she became attached to her, and showed

herself to her friend as she was in all her naïve and serene uprightness.

Thus in a few weeks they had become very intimate, and they passed many hours together in Emilie's studio, for Héléne had begun to paint on china very well, and as she leant over the table, with a large bibbed apron around her, delicately handling the brush, Mademoiselle Lereboulley painted her portrait. One afternoon as Emilie was smoking a cigarette and aiding Héléne, who was copying a Persian plate taken down from the studio wall, with her advice, she said to her pupil—

“I am not at all dissatisfied with your portrait, it really is not coming out at all badly. If you will let me, I will send it to Petit's for the International Exhibition of Paintings.”

Héléne looked up, and laying down her brush—

“You may do as you like, but I think you could send a more attractive picture than my face.”

“Are you sincere when you say that? Or do you not know that you are extremely pretty? Thauziat, who is a connoisseur of female beauty, can enlighten you on that point. He never takes his eyes from you.”

A slight blush deepened the colour in Héléne's cheeks, but she made no answer. Emilie wished to drive her to her last entrenchments.

“Have you never seen that he loves you?”

“Do you think that Monsieur de Thauziat would waste his time by paying attention to me?”

“He is quite convinced that he is not wasting it.”

“Then he is mistaken,” said Mademoiselle de Graville, decidedly.

A sigh of relief escaped Emilie's lips. That Thauziat loved H  l  ne she had not the slightest doubt. Alas! she could not prevent the man she so hopelessly adored admiring other women. She was well aware that he had not met, and would not meet many hard-hearted ones, but it would have been a cruel blow to her if H  l  ne had loved him. Of all the rivals she feared, Mademoiselle de Graville would have been the one whom she could with most difficulty have tolerated. The friendship she had bestowed on her would have been poisoned, and she clung almost as tenaciously to her friendship for the one as she did to her love for the other. Now she felt easy. H  l  ne had not given way, but had come off victorious from so severe a trial. She placed implicit belief in her words—a mouth so proud could not lie.

Having learnt what she wished to know, Emilie changed the conversation, and there was no further question of Cl  ment between the two girls.

After meeting with such success with H  l  ne, Mademoiselle Lereboulley determined to recommence her man  uvres with Thauziat and try to induce him to tell her his secret intentions, though she knew that the task was not so easy a one as that she had already performed, and that her second adversary would differ very materially from the confiding young girl. But Cl  ment himself offered her the opportunity she sought. One evening after a dinner-party at the senator's house, he was sitting in the drawing-room, patiently listening to Lady Olifaunt who was singing, with more confidence than voice, the exquisite lament of the Cid—" *Pleurez mes yeux*," and as the beautiful Englishwoman finished her song, amidst the applause of her audience, Emilie went over to Cl  ment, and, glancing at Diana—

"She has so often been told that she has four thousand francs in her throat, that she is always making terrible efforts to try and get them out," she said, in her boyish manner.

"She must undergo a great deal of suffering during the process then, for she utters awful shrieks," replied Thauziat, drily.

"I am afraid Louis does not sufficiently appreciate the service you have rendered him by stepping between him and his beautiful divinity."

"Well, he thinks it better to stay at home for the present."

"But he would have been here this evening if Mademoiselle de Graville had accepted our invitation."

"Do you think then he cannot bear to be away from her?"

"I think he has a strong liking for her, which Madame Hérault encourages in every way."

"What! She would think of marrying him to Mademoiselle Hélène?"

"Of course. Do you imagine Hélène is one of those women a man needn't marry?"

Thauziat made no reply. He fell into a reverie, and seemed to forget Emilie's presence. She, on her side, dared not address him, although she would have given worlds to know what was passing through his mind. After a long silence, he looked up and said, as though continuing their former conversation—

"Perhaps she would be the wife he needs. If she can assume any influence over him all will be well."

"I think she likes him very much," said Emilie.

For a moment Clément's eyes flashed and his lips tightened. Then he said indifferently—

“ Well, I wish them all luck ! May they be happy and have a large family ! ”

With that he rose, and Emilie could get nothing more from him.

As for old Madame Hérault she made no effort to conceal her feelings. She simply adored Hélène, for never before had she been so coddled and caressed as she was now by this girl. It had been very difficult for her, trained as she was to absolute passivity, to assume the habit of command. The cares and management of her fortune and her house weighed on her like a heavy burden, which she soon shifted to the shoulders of Mademoiselle de Graville, who knew how to make herself at once loved and respected by every servant in the house. She had so sweet and gentle a way of giving her orders, that even the steward, who was a very important member of the household, said one day to Madame Hérault—

“ I would rather receive a command from Mademoiselle Hélène than an entreaty from most.”

And the old grandmother found, to her astonishment and delight, that her adopted daughter had bewitched everybody, and had gained by degrees and without the slightest clash, an authority which was incontestable.

“ Whatever should I do if Hélène left me now ? ” she sometimes thought ; and if her grandson had told her he loved the young girl and had asked her permission to marry her, she would certainly have received his confession with enthusiasm.

But Louis, in his easy nonchalant way, was quite content to bask in the sunshine of Mademoiselle de Graville’s presence, and did not dream of making any alterations in his present beatific state. With his weak nature, which was

never aroused to any real vigour unless it was a question of some vice to gratify, he was one of those men who are a long time making up their minds to anything, but who once having made a resolution cling to it, even though it should be a bad one, with all their strength rather than arrive at another decision.

After his conversation with Emilie, Clément passed some days without visiting his friends at the Faubourg Poissonnière, much to the latter's astonishment, though Louis often saw him at Lereboulley's and at Saint Denis, for the Franco-American cable scheme was approaching its completion. After much reflection the senator had decided, by Thauziat's advice, to form a company, nearly all the shares of which would be taken up by himself, Louis and a very rich Yankee named Arthur J. Smithson. The two extremities of the cable were to be at Brest and Panama, for they thought it most advisable to be near the canal that was being dug.

Lereboulley, who was highly elated at the thought of injuring the interests of the English transatlantic cable company (as if it were the odious Sir James he was about to strike through his fellow-countrymen), developed his ideas, called committee meetings, and plied Thauziat with questions, soliciting an approbation which the latter, apparently heedless of what his partner in the project was saying to him, gave freely and carelessly. His mind, usually so quick and strong, was evidently worried and troubled, and Louis, seeing his indifference and apathy, became bold as he thought that after all Clément was not so clever as he had hitherto judged him. Incapable of forming an idea of the tempestuous workings of which this lassitude was the

result, he smiled as he told himself, "I can meet him on his own ground and vanquish him," and he was rash enough to ask his friend why he did not come to the Faubourg Poissonnière as he used to do.

"If you particularly wish me to come, I will," answered Thauziat, with a glance in which Louis perceived all the sardonic keenness of former days.

"My grandmother would be delighted if you would call," said Hérault, feeling somewhat piqued. "Especially as we shall soon be going to Boissise."

"I can visit you there just as easily as at Paris, when I return from Insprück."

"Are you going to Austria?"

"Yes. I am going to stay with Prince Wienitsgrøetz, who has invited me to his place year after year for the chamois hunting."

"He has decidedly given up all thoughts of Hélène," thought Louis to himself, and a feeling of utter security took the place of the anxiety he had felt.

And yet it was at this very time that Clément's thoughts were the most persistently turned towards Mademoiselle de Graville. His proud, rebellious nature was not one to surrender without many struggles, and, before yielding to a passion different from any he had hitherto experienced, he used every means to resist it. He submitted his own feelings to the strictest examination, he discussed with himself the woman who inspired them, he tried to prove to his own satisfaction that she was not worth the trouble he was taking over her, he took upon himself the rôle of a sage counsellor, and pointed out to himself all the dangers amidst which such a love would lead him; and all his

arguments started from Emilie Lereboulley's words: "Do you think she is one of those women a man needn't marry?"

To marry was a grave step, and one which Clément could not make up his mind to take. Had it been a question of eloping with Hélène, of carrying her off from Madame Hérault's, of sacrificing to her for a time a portion of his liberty, he would not have hesitated to do so for a moment. Neither Louis' anguish nor his grandmother's sorrow would have touched his heart. He would have made everything subordinate to his own pleasure, as he was always accustomed to do, and whatever might have been the consequences of his deed he would not have feared them. But to totally change the course of his life, to modify his social position, in one day to alter his whole future, and all for a woman! He laughed at the idea, with his mouth twitching with rage the while it is true, but still he laughed as he swore that never would he be so inconsistent to his past.

Then he must give Hélène up? His reason answered, yes, but his whole being revolted at the thought that she might be another's, that her supple form might quiver in the embrace of arms other than his own, and her eyes droop in the ecstasy of a pleasure he would not share. When such ideas as these entered his brain he could not dispel them. The solitude in which he had elaborated so many bold schemes and cherished so many happy dreams was now hateful to him. He felt forced into the streets, there to weary himself by physical exercise, but even there did the seductive phantom often follow him, and, bending over him, seem to say, "Why are you fleeing

from me? Should I not always be a true and tender companion? You would find me constantly at your side, ready to encourage and admire you, and, at least, your ambition would have an object, your efforts would not be wholly selfish, and your enjoyment of your triumphs would be infinitely keener if we were two to rejoice over them!" And in vain did he attempt to dismiss these haunting thoughts.

He had again fallen into the habit of visiting Lady Olifaunt, for with her he felt he was the most surely protected against himself. The beautiful Englishwoman's house was a sort of magic lantern, through which passed in quick and constant succession all sorts of men and women. There Thauziat had no time to think, and distraction for him meant safety.

Diana had wished to question him about what was going on at the Héraults', but Clément had answered with such evident annoyance that she had not insisted, however much she may have wished to gratify her curiosity; she had known too long and too well the man with whom she was dealing to take any liberty with him when he did not seem in a mood to allow it. For a moment the suspicion had crossed her mind that Thauziat was in love, but in that case it was so very unlikely that his love was not returned, that, without troubling to inquire further, she attributed her friend's unequal temper to grave, business preoccupations. She knew he was engaged in some vast enterprises which the general misery and stagnation of trade were likely to compromise, and, mercenary as she was, nothing seemed more natural to her than anxiety on such a point, though Lereboulley assured her that

Thauziat ran not the slightest risk, and that if he had any cares they were not monetary ones.

Then she tried to attract Clément by a display of coquetry ; but, for the first time, she found him cold and insensible. He did not even seem aware of the advances she was making him, and continued to treat her simply as a comrade. He went out with her a great deal, perfectly indifferent whither she led him. As a rule she made an appointment with Sir James, who generally came in from a sale at the Hôtel Drouot, or a visit to a bric-à-brac dealer, with some new knick-knack in his pocket, and then they went to finish the evening at a fashionable restaurant or one of the smaller theatres with Lereboulley.

One afternoon, about five o'clock, as Clément and Diana were driving through the Rue de Sèze, they saw the notice of an exhibition of pictures, and Diana thinking she should like to see it, the carriage was stopped and they went in. It was one of those galleries so many of which have sprung into existence during the last few years in addition to the annual and official *Salon*, to form as it were a number of little churches where each artist has his shrine. Many members of society have enlisted in the ranks of professional artists, and the talent they display is by no means the smallest of the attractions offered by these private exhibitions. It was the first day, and the large rooms were crowded by a public anxious to see. Diana and Clément commenced to go the round, carelessly gazing at the pictures with which the walls were covered, and taking far more interest in the crowd around them.

They had already met a few people of their acquaintance to whom she had smiled and he had raised his hat, when

from a group which had formed a few yards before them the words, "It is by Mademoiselle Lereboulley," attracted their attention. They drew nearer, and suddenly Thauziat stood motionless his eyes fixed on the picture before him, for on the black-framed canvas he had recognised, with her grave smile and proud eyes, the woman who was never absent from his thoughts. Diana looked at him in amazement, and seeing he had stopped short before a portrait, asked—

"Well, Thauziat, what is the matter?"

He made no answer, fascinated by the picture and perfectly unable to take his eyes from it.

"Who is the woman who possesses so powerful an influence over him that he forgets all to lose himself in an ecstatic contemplation of her face?" thought Lady Olifaunt. "Is it she who is the cause of the strange anxiety of which we cannot discover the reason? Who can she be? Emilie Lereboulley knows her, yet I have never met her, and her face is quite unknown to me."

She left Clément to his adoration, while she thought and looked at the people moving past, until an exclamation from her companion made her look round. Coming towards her was the original of the portrait, with Emilie Lereboulley and Louis Hérault.

Clément had turned very pale, and Diana smiled as she murmured between her teeth—

"It is all explained!"

Only a space of a few yards separated the two parties. Hélène had instinctively stopped when she saw Thauziat with Lady Olifaunt, Emilie had turned pale and Louis had glanced at his friend with eyes full of anguish. It was

Clément, who was yet the most agitated of them all, who made the first movement to lessen the embarrassment of the situation. He approached Hélène, and bowing to her with that respectful courtesy which at once assigns her rightful position to the woman to whom it is rendered—

“We were admiring the portrait which is so faithful a copy of your features, mademoiselle, because of its beauty,” he said. “But now that we are able to compare it with the original, it also compels our admiration for the skill of its painter, of whose talent the comparison leaves not the slightest doubt.”

“Come, come, Monsieur de Thauziat !” returned Emilie. “We shall only accept the first half of your compliment. The beauty of the model may well be praised ; but as for the work itself—”

She broke off abruptly, and, affecting to discover Diana at that moment only—

“Ah, forgive me, my dear Lady Olifaunt ! I did not see you. Louis, here is Lady Olifaunt.”

Louis bowed, but the Englishwoman did not even turn her head in his direction. She was intently gazing at the girl in whom she had detected a rival, and as she looked her lips became drawn and thin and her blue eyes appeared the colour of steel. She stepped forward, and, turning to Emilie—

“Pray introduce mademoiselle and me,” she said. “I should be so delighted to make the acquaintance of one so charming. I see you already love her.”

“Very much, indeed !” replied Emilie, with an accent that was almost threatening. “Well, since you wish it—Hélène, dear, Lady Olifaunt, one of the prettiest women Paris can boast. Madame, Mademoiselle de Graville.”

Diana took no notice of the impertinent way in which Emilie had reversed the order of introduction, nor of the contemptuous tone she had used in describing her as "one of the prettiest women Paris can boast." She turned to Hélène, and, holding out her hand—

"I am indeed glad to know you, mademoiselle," she said, "and I shall hope to have the pleasure of often meeting you, since you are the friend of Mademoiselle Lereboulley."

Then passing between Mademoiselle de Graville and Louis, she whispered to the latter with an irony which startled him :

"I compliment you on your taste."

One moment more she stood looking at Hélène and Louis with her malicious smile upon her lips, then she murmured—

"Very nice, indeed !"

Then she took Thauziat's arm, bowed slightly to the two ladies, said aloud, "*Au revoir*," and passed on.

Hélène watched her for a moment, admiring her graceful walk, her supple figure, her easy movements, then—

"So that is the famous Lady Olifaunt, of whom I have so often heard you speak," she said to Emilie.

"Yes, dear, the divine Diana herself ; wife of Sir James Olifaunt, Baronet."

"Why did she watch Monsieur Hérault and me so closely ?"

"Because she knows your history, and that Madame Hérault loves you as if you were her daughter."

A slight blush overspread Hélène's face as she shook her head and answered—

"I saw hatred in her eyes. But I am poor and insignificant ; she is rich and superb. Why should she hate me ?"

“Because she is one of those people who count their own happiness as nothing, and only esteem that of others,” replied Emilie. “Envy alloys their every enjoyment; and unless they can see everyone else around them miserable, and themselves alone successful, their satisfaction is incomplete. That is Diana’s nature. She has seen you smiling, and surrounded and at peace, and she entirely forgets her own pleasures and circle of admirers. It only needed her to see you for a moment to make her hate you, for she guessed that you were happy.”

“And she guessed rightly,” said H  l  ne, gravely; “and she can hate me if she likes, for it is true that I am indeed happy.”

Louis longed to seize the young girl’s hand and tell her of the joy her words caused him, but a glance from Emilie restrained him, and, with his heart full of a new-found happiness, he followed in silence her who seemed to be guiding him so surely to the most smiling future he could wish.

Meanwhile, Lady Olifaunt was continuing the round of the gallery on Cl  ment’s arm. She was no longer looking at the pictures; she was no longer even seeking acquaintances amidst the throng; she was meditating. At last they went down the stone staircase, and passing through the turnstile, left the exhibition, and re-entered the carriage. As soon as she was seated, Diana turned towards Thauziat, and said to him in a hard voice—

“Then that is the companion that that little fool of a Louis is making love to? She really isn’t half bad-looking, and I can quite understand how delighted old Madame H  rault must be. A mistress in the house! Why, it is the dream

of every mother ; for then the dear child does not go out so much, and, instead of making him disorderly, love reforms him."

She would doubtless have continued to thus vent the rage that was consuming her, had not Thauziat placed his hand on her arm, and said—

"The conduct of Mademoiselle de Graville is irreproachable, and I shall esteem it a favour if you will not speak of her in my presence."

These words came as a revelation to Diana. She uttered an exclamation, and striking her parasol on the palm of her hand—

"What a fool I have been !" she cried. "I did not understand before, but I have it now ! You love Mademoiselle de Graville yourself, and you and Louis Hérault are rivals ! You, Clément, you ?"

He made no answer and nothing could be gathered from the expression of his face, but he was nervously twisting and untwisting his gloves, and sometimes his hand clenched involuntarily.

"What a triumph for the young lady ! To agitate to such a degree the handsome and invincible Thauziat ! Then she resists you ?"

"I have never uttered a word to her to lead her to suspect that I love her."

"That I love her," repeated Diana. "I don't mind telling you, Clément, that it has a singular effect upon me to hear the word 'love' from your lips applied to anyone but myself."

"Are you going to be jealous of me as well as of Louis ?" asked Thauziat, with a slight smile.

“Well, to tell the truth, I am not most pleased with the young lady. And so you crave for her with a secret longing? That’s tolerably romantic to begin with, my boy, for so hard-headed a man. For the last fortnight you have been suffering like a soul in torment; what can I do to relieve your torture? Would you like me to go and ask her hand for you? I shall be very pleased to play the part of your mother, under the circumstances, and Lereboulley and Sir James could be witnesses. How would that do?”

“Do not jest, Diana. The matter is too serious.”

“I am speaking to you of marriage, how can I be more serious than that? You do not think of marrying? Then can you dispense with the ceremony?”

“I wish to forget. For the first time in my life I am not master of myself, and you know me well enough to know what pain it causes me to find that such is the case. What is a man who is at the mercy of his heart? Until now mine has obeyed the dictates of my mind. I wish to force it to obedience again, and I am going away.”

“My dear fellow,” returned Diana, “absence kills a caprice, but invigorates a passion.”

“If I suffer too acutely, I shall return. Then my resolution will be taken, and I shall do everything in my power to make her I love mine.”

“And if she loves another?”

“I hope she will not, for her sake, as for the other’s, and for my own.”

“That’s right! Now you are becoming yourself again.”

Clément did not reply, and Diana leant back in the cushioned corner of the carriage, and again gave herself

up to her thoughts. Already she saw in her mind the image of Louis returning suppliant and reconquered. With cruel joy, she bound him with tight-drawn chains, and on this slave, drunk with draughts from her love philters, she revenged herself for the humiliation he had made her suffer.

CHAPTER VI.

BOISSISE had undergone several changes since the day Madame Hérault resolved to encamp there rather than be separated from her grandson. Pierre Hérault had thoroughly restored the château, and added to the park by buying up a great deal of the surrounding property. The grassy banks of a lake, dug in the middle of a meadow, now stretched as far as the first trees of the forest, and, on the summit of a slight elevation on an island, rose the white columns of a little temple amidst the foliage, as in Hubert Robert's charming idylls. The walks in the park, over which the thick trees formed sombre domes, were lighted, in the evening, by candelabra lighted by gas brought from the house. Everywhere art and progress lent their aid to nature.

A wide flight of steps led into a splendid garden laid out in flower-beds in the centre of each of which stood an enormous vase in the shape of a basket, the handle of which was formed by an arch of wire covered with climbing roses, while at either end rose a cone of scarlet blossoms four yards high formed of two thousand potted geraniums skilfully arranged in rows one above the other. In the borders flourished azaleas bearing red flowers at the top and white at the bottom, a triumph of scientific grafting. In the stables, entirely reconstructed, room could be found for

twenty horses on hunt days, and early in the autumn the woods were alive with pheasants.

This magnificent estate had scarcely been used since Pierre Hérault's death, though the staff of servants remained the same. Every spring the gardeners put the park walks in order, planted the beds with flowers, mowed the lawns and sprinkled them for days together with an ingenious system of watering. Every summer the keepers saw that the preserves were stocked with the same number of partridges and pheasants. In short, everything was always ready to receive the masters, and yet Boissise was forsaken. Louis generally took down a few friends for a week at the beginning of the shooting season, then he went away again and did not return until the following year.

To him, existence in this great château would have been unbearable, *tête-à-tête* with Madame Hérault. In vain had Lereboulley stayed for two months at his country seat, his society did not possess sufficient attraction for Louis, who had not, like the senator, important political interests to fill his time for weeks together in Eure. He had no popularity to maintain, no influence to gain, no electoral circuits to undertake, and time hung heavy on his hands when he could not pass the evening in a stall, or at the club, or the house of some fair, though frail, friend. At the end of a week, his longing to inhale Parisian air became irresistible, and he had but one idea—to order the carriage, fly from the mysterious stillness of the woods and the limitless greenness of the meadows, and return to town, where all was noise and no view was without its limit.

Louis discovered in Boissise, for the first time, fascina-

tions hitherto unknown to him, when he saw Mademoiselle de Graville there. He no longer felt as before an *ennui* that had no remedy, and he wondered at finding the solitude less overwhelming, without understanding that he himself was peopling the château with his dreams and hopes. With Hélène he visited pleasure-grounds, kitchen-gardens, and farms, taking a lively interest in all the things to which before he had been perfectly indifferent. It amazed him to find how universal was Mademoiselle de Graville's knowledge, for, having passed the first sixteen years of her life in the country, she knew all the secrets of gardening and farming, and to this Parisian, who could not tell a field of wheat from a field of oats, she seemed a wonder.

"Mademoiselle de Graville is simply marvellous, she knows everything!" he said one day to Madame Hérault in a burst of admiration.

The old lady did not contradict him. She herself was not very far from believing that every perfection was united in the young girl, and, fired by her grandson's enthusiasm, she joined the young people in their strolls and did the honours of her hothouses. But it happened that Louis found no pleasure in listening to his grandmother's explanations. He began to think that horticulture was decidedly not so interesting as it seemed, and that discussions on flowers were only worth listening to when they were uttered by certain lips. The evening before he had passed a delightful hour looking at the common wall-flowers and sweet peas which twined around the trees in the yard before the household offices; now he yawned enough to dislocate his jaws in the orchid-house before beautiful monstrosities worth two thousand francs a pot, and he

was therefore forced to come to the conclusion that all his pleasure was derived from H  l  ne's companionship alone, and that he only cared for strolls in the garden when they offered him the advantage of being entirely alone with her. The presence of a third person spoilt it all, even if that third was only his grandmother, who certainly was not very much in the way but who committed the unpardonable offence of making H  l  ne keep on her best behaviour, and so preventing her from giving vent to all her na  ve and charming exuberance of spirits.

For, now she had returned to the woods and fields amidst which her childhood had been passed, Mademoiselle de Graville's happiness was complete, and lent a fresh brilliancy to her severe beauty. The pallor with which days of hard work in a small, close room had bespread her cheeks gave place to a healthy glow, and her eyes shone yet more brightly than before. And there was as great a transformation in her mental as in her physical qualities. Her nature, until then curbed and repressed by care and worry, expanded in this congenial atmosphere like a plant in the warmth of spring after the icy, wintry winds, and the grave curves of her mouth disappeared in smiles, her reserve changed to light-hearted gaiety. Her happiness made her perfectly irresistible, and Madame H  rault and Louis watched the metamorphosis in delighted wonder, and, taking all the credit of it to themselves, became the more attached to the girl they considered in some part their handiwork. The old grandmother glowed with maternal pride as she saw the pretty figure develop and become each day more graceful and more elegant, while Louis was fairly dazzled by H  l  ne's intellect and powers of imagination,

which, delivered from the yoke of poverty, had nothing to restrain their power and daintiness.

In a few days Emilie Lereboulley, who was at Evreux with her father, came to stay at Boissise, and then the young people passed their whole time out of doors. They all three drove over the country in Emilie's little pony-chaise, drawn by a short-legged, sturdy Irish cob, and one day passed the famous cross-road where Mademoiselle Lereboulley had met Louis for the first time and where he had helped her to get her carriage out of the mud. They went pic-nicking to the ruins of Saint-Wulfrand, happy as school-children turned loose amidst the thick trees of the forest where the deep silence was only broken by the plaintive call of the cuckoo, or the startled noisy flight of a jay.

They rambled through the lanes in silence, tired and drowsy from being in the open air, but happy at being together, and as delighted as if they had been saying the tenderest words to each other, so full of joy were their hearts. When they sat down on a bank, at the foot of a great oak through whose branches filtered the golden sunlight, Louis passed hours stealthily gazing at Hélène. He would have liked to throw himself at her feet, and say to her, "I adore you. Be mine, and make my life an eternity of love;" but he was restrained by the effort it would need to speak to her, the indecision of his nature, the fear of disturbing the harmony of these blissful days. "What would be the good?" he thought. "I have plenty of time, and, besides, should I be any happier if she were my wife? What greater felicity could I possess than I already have?"

The love he felt for Hélène was, for the first time since

he was aware he possessed a heart, perfectly pure. He admired and loved the young girl, but there was something very fraternal in his affection, and, if they had ever lost themselves in the woods, he could have passed the whole night beside her in a woodcutter's hut without feeling the least desire to take her in his arms. It would have been a bitter grief to him if anyone had suggested to him that he might lose her, that another might cause her the moral delight he was experiencing himself, for he could not now have lived without her. And yet he was not ready to attempt everything in the world to call her his own. There was a certain maidenly majesty about her which awed him. He regarded her somewhat as a goddess, with whom mortals had no right to take too much liberty. His love was largely mingled with respect, and this respect, which he had never before felt for a young and pretty woman, sealed his lips.

It was yet impossible for anyone to be more simple, more natural or more gay than was Mademoiselle de Graville. Her haughtiness, which was really only shyness, had disappeared, and she treated Louis as a brother, showing him a slight deference which was the outcome of her gratitude towards the child of her who had rescued her from poverty. She had a sincere affection for Hérault, an affection which had sprung from the dreams of former days and the reality of the present. For her, he was always the slight, pale young man who used to traverse the courtyard of the mansion, dressed in deep mourning for his father, and whom she used to follow with eyes full of affectionate pity. He had not changed since then, although he was no longer sad. He had the same careless walk, the same graceful, slightly

effeminate carriage, the same gentle look, and she found him as she had thought him—weak and easily led, yet capable of every violence when he felt himself supported, a man in years, but a child in character, needing guidance in life to save him falling a prey to fools and knaves.

She knew now, from what she had heard said before her, the importance of the industrial interests which were under the control of this feeble hand, and she saw, with vexation, how entirely they were abandoned. How could the son of a great manufacturer leave the direction of his workshops to strangers and pass his life in idleness instead of himself keeping the vast machine in motion? Oh! If she had been a man, and such a task had fallen to her share, with what zeal would she have devoted to it all the resources of her mind! Sometimes she spoke thus before Louis, though she was always careful not to hurt him by frankly expressing her opinion, in which he merited so much blame. But she endeavoured to sting and spur him on to see if she could arouse him to a pitch of energy.

“A man’s first duty is to work,” she would say. “What is a man who does nothing?”

“A man who does nothing is a man who enjoys life, who wanders in the woods, reclines in the shade, and who talks to you all the evening, Mademoiselle Hélène; in fact, he is a happy man,” Louis replied, with a smile.

“But is he of any use?”

“Of a great deal to himself.”

“But is that enough?”

“That is a matter of opinion.”

“Well, supposing you were poor, Monsieur Hérault?”

“I should do like everybody else—try not to be. But,

fortunately, my father and my grandfather saw to that before me."

"And you leave the great interests they have bequeathed you to get on as best they can. Every fortune which does not augment, diminishes, as Monsieur Lereboulley so truly said the other day. Do you wish to end by coming to ruin?"

"I shall always have enough as long as I want anything. If I had any heirs, if, in my turn, I became the head of a family, perhaps my ideas would change. But, at present, for whom should I be toiling? I do not like work for its own sake. I can quite understand working for anyone dear to me, for a wife or a child, for instance, but to work merely for the sake of doing something, or to make money, no, I don't feel that that is my vocation."

Then Emilie, with her sarcastic smile, put an end to the discussion—

"Little Hérault, you are a degenerate descendant of the big and of the middle Hérault. You will be sure to come to nothing, my fine friend, unless you have a strong hand to maintain and guide you. And after all, is it not really only right that the enormous wealth you possess should return to those who pass their lives in daily toil? Oh, don't get scared, and set me down as a socialist. It has been proved that in our time fortunes never last for more than three generations. The grandfather makes it, the son keeps it, and the grandson dissipates it. You are the grandson, Louis Hérault-Gandon, and you have shown you know how to fling money away by running through all your mother left you. The rest will go the same way, unless your hands are very securely tied!"

"Thank you. Do you want anything for all that advice?"

"It is gratis, dear boy. Profit by it, if you can, though there is very little probability that you will."

Sometimes, Louis, driven to extremities by the two girls' arguments, would say, with pretended gravity—

"Very well. I will return to Paris and go to the factory, if that will give you any satisfaction."

To which Emilie would reply—

"Oh, don't do that. You would get hot and tired in the train, you would go to the club in the evening and lose a thousand or so louis at baccarat, and then be back here to dinner the very next day, so what would be the good of setting off?"

Louis laughed, and they went out for a walk.

But H  l  ne was not satisfied. She thought Emilie was not in earnest enough with H  rault, and it hurt her to see Mademoiselle Lereboulley always affect to treat him as a big child with no will of his own. It seemed like an insult to herself to doubt the abilities of her benefactress's grandson. She spoke of it to Madame H  rault, who agreed with her, for she, the old grandmother, also wished to see the heir do a deed worthy of a man, and prove at last that the vigorous blood of his family was in his veins.

She had always hoped that Louis, after sowing the wild oats of his youth, would reform and become steady, and the marvellous change which she had noticed in him within the last few weeks seemed to indicate that what she had hoped for was about to come to pass. He was evidently going to reform, but it would not do to ask too much of him all at once. He had taken a fancy to domestic life. He, who had always been away for months together, rushing

from one watering-place to another, passing the summer at Trouville, the winter at Monaco, gambling, dining, making life one perpetual fête, and being seen everywhere except at his own home, now stayed at home and seemed quite happy there. That was so decided an advance in the right direction, that it would be dangerous to demand more for fear of losing all.

"You see, my dear," said Madame Hérault, "here we are sure of him, whereas if he were at Paris, it would only need a bad inspiration to make him commit more follies. Do not let us send him to town, where he has friends who gain his money from him at the club, without speaking of other bad acquaintances. Let us keep him here, it will be his salvation. As long as we have him with us, he is out of the way of all danger."

Then old Madame Hérault sighed and glanced at the young girl, without venturing to say what was in her mind. But, in her heart of hearts, she longed for her grandson to make up his mind to marry Hélène. What did it matter if the latter was poor? Her strong, clear sense and the ever-increasing influence she possessed over Louis were more than equivalent to a dowry, for they constituted a wealth which could not be taken away and of which safety and happiness would be the interest. And then in giving Mademoiselle de Graville part of their fortune the Héraults would only be paying off a debt contracted sixty years ago, and repaying the descendant for the help rendered by the ancestors. These thoughts were continually in her mind, but she said nothing of them either to her grandson, whose good inclinations she was afraid of upsetting, or to Hélène, whose suspicions she did

not wish to arouse. She trusted to the close intercourse engendered by the country, to the intimacy fostered by walks in the woods, to the very pleasure of existing, caused by the bright sun, pure air, and perfume of the flowers, to bring about the result she desired.

In the meantime, to prevent existence at Boissise being too cloister-like, Madame Hérault scattered invitations broadcast, and with Lereboulley's aid managed to make life very gay. The neighbouring châteaux did all they could to assist, the regiment at Evreux contributed its most dashing officers, and every week there were gatherings at which the guests devoted themselves to boating, fishing, pigeon shooting, lawn tennis, or dancing according to their several tastes.

In this way passed the summer, and August arrived. Madame Hérault's birthday was on the tenth, and Louis determined to give a brilliant fête to celebrate it. Invitations were sent far and wide, some even reaching Paris, and the château was filled with guests for the first time that season ; it was like a return to the days of Pierre Hérault, when Boissise used to be filled with different relays of guests every week, as in a royal abode. The programme of amusements had been arranged by Louis and Emilie. There were to be fireworks in the evening (the set pieces were erected the evening before), and a ball was to be given for the villagers in a marquee which entirely covered the large lawn in the park, while bands were to be placed on the lake, in boats hung with Venetian lanterns. Indoors there was to be a dinner-party, to which forty guests were invited.

At five o'clock, just when the scene was presenting the

most animated appearance, Lereboulley, who never lost an opportunity of increasing his influence over the husbands by making love to their wives, arrived, dressed in light grey trousers, white waistcoat and a blue coat, which, according to Emilie, looked at once festive and dignified amongst the red coats of the younger men. After the first compliments and salutations had been exchanged, he crossed the lawn, where an exciting game of tennis was going on, and approaching a group, in the centre of which stood Madame Hérault and Hélène, said—

“I hope I have not done wrong, but I have invited another guest whom you did not expect. If there is no room for him at dinner, you can put him at a little table with Emilie.”

“Who is it?” asked Madame Hérault, a little astonished at this unceremonious disposal of the new-comer.

“Thauziat,” answered the senator.

There followed an embarrassed silence, during which Louis, Hélène, and Emilie exchanged glances which plainly expressed their feelings. For the moment the sympathy between them was so complete that they could not have learnt more from one another if each had confided to the other what had been passing through their minds for the last two months. Clément’s unexpected arrival was a cause for fear to each one of them. Louis shuddered as he thought that his friend had doubtless returned because of Hélène. Emilie bitterly thought that Thauziat was about to make a supreme effort to obtain Mademoiselle de Graville’s heart. Hélène herself saw in the reappearance of his sombre face a threat against Louis’ safety and her own happiness.

Lereboulley continued his explanation :

“He arrived just now by the express, and, taking a fly, entered my study just as I was coming here. I wanted to bring him with me without any ceremony, but he would not consent in case he might be intruding. As if he were not as much at home here as he is at my place! In short, I made the arrangement that if you would have him I would send back my carriage for him, and if not, he is to dine alone and come on here this evening.”

“Send back the carriage at once,” said Madame Hérault. “He must be one of our party, even if we have to squeeze a little.”

Louis turned to Hélène and gazed at her with entreating eyes. He was a little pale, and never had he so openly shown her that he loved her. The young girl’s heart was filled with an exquisite rapture, and she ventured to smile at him, as she held her head erect and looked him full in the face, as though to say: “Fear nothing, I am yours and yours only, and all the Don Juans on earth could not deprive you of what belongs to you.” But he sadly bent his head. He knew Clément, and he was afraid. Hélène pitied him, and, turning to Emilie, she said—

“Will you walk round to the ball-room with us? It would be as well to see if the decorations have been carried out as you proposed.”

She took Louis’ arm without waiting for him to offer it, and they all three walked down the shady alleys of the park, gathering from their memories of the delightful, cloudless days that were gone, strength with which to face the tempest. The only sounds they could hear were the merry shouts of the tennis-players, and, after the bustle and movement of the lawn, the still darkness of the leafy, perfumed

paths gave them a sense of delicious repose. They did not go as far as the marquee, for they knew Hélène's proposal had been but a pretext to be by themselves, and when it was no longer possible for them to remain away from their guests they slowly and in silence retraced their steps.

Evening was closing in, and the rooms in the château were ablaze with light. They went up the steps; entered the house, and the first, the only, person they saw was the man whose presence they so much dreaded, talking to Madame Hérault, as he stood by the fire-place. He was thinner, and therefore looked even taller than before. There were hollows in his handsome face, and a few silver threads shone amidst his black hair; but he smiled and his eyes brightened as he saw his friend and the two girls. He crossed over to Louis with outstretched hand, and it was impossible to doubt his truth and openness after the warm, close pressure of that hand.

Perhaps he had returned to conquer Hélène, but at any rate he was not going to use any underhand means to procure his victory. He must have felt some hope, for his face was beaming; indeed, Hélène had never seen him look so bright before. Ever since the first evening she had met him, she had always seen him worried and preoccupied; now she saw the Thauziat who was invariably triumphant, the Thauziat whose elegance was supreme, whose wit so dazzling, whose manners were so tender, so nearly irresistible. Even the white streaks in his hair were an improvement, for being near the temples they gave him an air of gentleness he had never had before.

"I think you are a little changed," said Emilie, gazing at him sadly. "Have you been ill during your absence?"

“ Yes, I have had a great deal to worry me, and some serious decisions to arrive at. But that is all over now. I have made up my mind what to do.”

They all three glanced at one another. Did he mean them to understand that though he had adored *Hélène*, yet he had decided to give her up? Or else, with his usual proud frankness, was he boldly waving his standard before them and making a declaration of war?

He did not speak much to *Hélène* in particular, neither did he utter before her one word which could throw any light upon the situation. He spoke of the sport he had had, and told of the immense pine forests where the trees are so big that when one is blown down across the path ladders have to be used to climb over the trunk; of his morning halts on the top of some mountain to await the dawn and the awakening of the heath-cock; of his excursions over arid peaks and along deep ravines in search of the chamois, so quick to suspect a danger, and of the terrified bounds of the animal, which would cling to the edge of a precipice with its trembling feet when the ball had reached it and then fall, gasping, at the hunter's feet. And this man of refinement, for whom Parisian luxury was never dainty enough, said that he had passed two delightful weeks in a hut thatched with branches, sleeping on a bed of dry ferns on the top of the *Arlberg*, with the rough peasants who served as beaters as his only companions, and the game that fell by his gun as his only food. He had almost lost the consciousness of his own identity amid these lonely woods and inaccessible rocks, and all care had left him in the presence of nature under this wild aspect.

He found the words of a poet to express his impressions,

and for the time held his audience spell-bound. For them, all vanished save himself and his words, and he absorbed into his own personality all those present, as the dawning sun absorbs the clouds and rises in all its dazzling splendour into the empty heavens.

For an hour there was not one man present but was jealous of him, not a woman but rendered homage to his incontestable superiority. He was what he wished to be—supreme, and he gave the woman, for whom he was thus displaying all the treasures of his mind, an unanswerable proof of his prestige and his power. Longing for love, he wished to show he was worthy of being loved. But was all this display necessary? Does not a woman's heart alway find arguments with which to triumph over the most logical reasoning of her mind?

“My dear Clément, there is no one equal to you,” said the delighted Madame Hérault, without dreaming, innocent old lady, that she was firing on her own troops, and she continued to overwhelm him with compliments and gracious speeches until dinner was announced.

The meal was long and dull, the number of guests preventing the conversation becoming general. Louis had the prefect's wife on his right, and an old dowager on his left, and he did his best to entertain them but all his attention was centred on Hélène, who was beside Lereboulley, and Thauziat, who was sitting next to Emilie. The forces being thus divided all combat became impossible, and besides, if an encounter was to take place, it would be better to choose a more favourable place and opportunity.

Still everyone felt relieved when dinner came to an end and they could at last leave the table. It was intolerably

hot indoors, while on the terrace there was a delicious breeze, so in a few minutes everyone had gone outside, and the drawing-rooms were deserted. The guests who were not staying in the house were to arrive in the evening, and Louis, who was on the rack, was compelled to remain with his grandmother to receive them.

He felt that in the falling shadows Thauziat would regain the complete liberty of his actions, that he would be able to walk with Hélène and talk to her, and that Emilie's presence would be no obstacle in his path. He had seen him so often before in similar cases, he knew so well his method of attack which, in one hour, would bring to his arms women blinded by an inexplicable infatuation. And he turned pale with impatience as he strained his eyes to look into the darkness and his ears to listen to every sound from outside, and only succeeded in seeing the sky crimsoned by the illuminations and hearing the shouts and laughter of the throng. Where were they? What were they doing? What were they saying? After an hour of such suspense he could bear it no longer, and, drawing Madame Hérault with him, he went into the garden.

The first rockets were just being let off, and every now and then a bright light succeeded to the darkness and the groups of people could be seen as plainly as in broad daylight. Louis hastily glanced around the terrace. He could see neither Hélène, Emilie, nor Thauziat, and, with sinking heart, he stood still, not daring to go in search of them, and yet feeling sure that during these moments of horrible torture his fate was being decided. A hand placed upon his shoulder aroused him from his terrible inaction, and, turning round, he saw Emilie, looking pale and grave.

He opened his mouth to ask, "Where are they?" but she seemed to know the anguish he must be suffering, for, before he could utter the words, she said, pointing in the direction of the lake,

"They are there."

Then he distinguished, amongst the many other confused forms, Clément's tall figure and Hélène's white dress beside it. They were leaning over the stone balustrade.

"Why have you not stopped with them?" asked Louis.

Emilie sadly smiled.

"Because I should have been as much a restraint upon their conversation as you would be yourself. They are talking; let them do so."

A sharp, burning pain shot through Louis' breast, the tears sprang to his eyes, and he dropped on to a marble seat.

"Must I then give up all hope?" he murmured. "Am I going to lose her?"

"Who can boast of knowing a woman's heart?" said Emilie, seating herself beside him. "Hélène is one of those girls who do not tell what is in their minds until they have decided to speak out, and who do not do anything they do not choose to do. Thauziat was bound to love her. Her nature is the exact counterpart of his own, and if he marries her chance will never before have united two halves which joined so perfectly to form the unity termed marriage."

Louis clenched his fists, and angrily raised his head.

"You exasperate me with your philosophy," he cried. "I should like to go and find Clément and insult him—strike him—"

“What right have you to do so? Have you any claim that you should try and prevent *Hélène* loving him?”

“I mean to try and kill him if she prefers him to me!”

“If it were necessary to spill blood each time the heart meets a rebuff,” said *Emilie* gently, “I should have caused a river to flow, I who have never been the object of anything but ridicule or contempt.”

“But what do you want me to do?”

“Nothing. You are not a man to rule fate, but to submit to it. Within the last month you have had twenty opportunities of telling *Hélène* you love her, but you merely gave way to the pleasurable feeling of being in love and found that enough for you. It needed the appearance of a rival to make you appreciate the treasure you treated so lightly. And now you shout and threaten. But why? *Mademoiselle de Graville* is perfectly free to make her choice. You surely are not foolish enough to think that the little for which she is indebted to you binds her in any way? She has done more for you by living in your house than you have done for her by raising her from poverty. By what right could you throw yourself between her and *Thauziat*? Are you her brother or her betrothed?”

“It is easy for you to talk,” said *Louis*, angrily. “But if you were in love—”

“I?” cried *Emilie*, and her fierce look startled the young man. “I?”

She burst into a terrible laugh, which displayed her sharp teeth.

“You are right! I do not love. I am condemned to have only friendship, never love. But I care very much for my friends, and, as much as I can, I try to help them,

as I am proving to you by keeping you here with me. Now, will you let me give you one word of good advice? Do not interfere with what is going on, and it will be the better for you. Let the others act; you stay still. There are times when the greatest generalship is shown in doing nothing. And, besides, with your character, even if Hélène should love Clément, you will soon console yourself-- "

"Never!"

"Oh, I know your 'nevers' and 'for evers.' They last just about a week. There, don't exclaim, the happiest people are those who forget. I only pity those who remember."

But Louis had started forward, and was listening to her no longer, so she followed him.

Hélène had inclined her head to Thauziat, and then slowly walked back to the terrace, while he accompanied her with the greatest respect in his manner. As they approached them, Emilie and Louis saw that he was smiling, but that Hélène looked very grave.

"It is a long time since you last saw Mademoiselle de Graville," said Emilie to Clément; "and I suppose you had a great many things to tell her, for you have been talking to her for over an hour."

"So long as that?" he answered, looking at Hélène. "I should not have thought it."

"Your conversation must have been very interesting," broke in Louis, who was pale with repressed annoyance.

"It was very interesting," said Hélène, with a calmness which terrified Hérault, for to him it meant a sentence of death pronounced upon his love. "Monsieur de Thauziat has been speaking to me of my native place and of people

I once knew, and he has asked me for some information, which I hope I shall soon be able to give him."

"To-morrow?" asked Clément.

"Yes, to-morrow," answered Mademoiselle de Graville.

They exchanged a look, which made Louis' blood boil. He understood that he was being deceived, and that the words he had just heard had a double meaning. But he contained himself in spite of his trembling limbs, his throbbing temples and his parched lips, hoping that some chance word might furnish him with the opportunity of letting the torrent of his rage pour forth. But this word was not uttered, for the time had come to visit the open-air ball, and Lereboulley coming up with Madame Hérault, the old lady took Hélène's arm, upon which she loved to lean, and the others followed in what order they chose.

From the terrace to the lawn, the central walk was lighted up with gas until it was as light as broad day. The birds, kept awake by the unusual light, flew in terror from branch to branch, and at the surface of the lake enormous carp were following the glittering, flashing boats, thinking it was day. In the portion of the park set aside for the public, open-air buffets had been erected, and the place was crowded with villagers and townspeople, while here and there the uniforms of the soldiers, who had obtained leave to come, made a bright dash of colour amidst the sombre clothes of the civilians.

In the marquee, dancing had commenced, and a hundred couples were whirling round to the strains of an orchestra placed on a platform. Country dances had been tabooed and they were all dancing polkas and waltzes as in town. There was a great deal of amusement going on, but

everyone seemed to be chiefly thinking of the effect he or she was producing. Because the carpenter from Boissise had wanted to put himself at his ease and take off his coat, on account of the heat, and talk and laugh in a noisy way, the steward of the château had put him outside, and he could still be heard loudly endeavouring to explain. The girls were walking about in their light dresses, with airs of mincing affectation, and there was a general element of stiffness in all this pleasure instead of the unceremonious freedom which was usual.

When Madame Hérault appeared with her friends she was greeted with loud cheers, and Lereboulley, who could not see a dozen people together in his department without beginning to speak, made a little speech in which he extolled the Hérault family. Then he praised the government, of which he was one of the shining lights, and managed to end up with the word : Republic. At that, the orchestra struck up a stirring air, but the Marseillaise was not heard, as Madame Hérault's steward had warned the leader beforehand that if he made use of his band to call up anything connected with politics, he would find himself minus any pay.

Madame Hérault remained for a short time to watch the enjoyment of those for whose pleasure she had so liberally provided, and then, feeling a little fatigued, returned to the château.

Dancing then began in the large drawing-room, but in a calm, pleasureless sort of way, for those who might have infused gaiety into the party were all either too abstracted or too heavy-hearted to do so. For two hours the band continued playing, and Hélène danced two or

three times in performance of her duty, but neither with Thauziat nor with Louis, both of whom avoided seeking her as a partner. She, on her side, evidently agitated in spite of the command she had over herself, kept near Emilie, who respected her friend's preoccupation and only addressed her every now and then upon indifferent subjects.

About one o'clock the two girls went outside. It was an exquisite night and the deep blue sky was glittering with stars while the trees in the park were silvered by the pale light of the moon, now far above the horizon. The lakes were silent and deserted, and the music in the tent sounded far away. An intense peacefulness reigned around, and the calm serenity, where everything was overwhelmed by the majestic immensity of space, formed a strange and striking contrast to the restlessness of human beings. The illuminations were dying out and the noisy music of the band sounded like a murmur. A soft, cool breeze kissed the fevered brow, and the eyes lost themselves in contemplation of this still beauty as did the mind in thought.

For some time H  l  ne and Emilie stood leaning against the iron balustrade in silence. Then Mademoiselle Lereboulley heard a sigh which made her look up and she noticed that H  l  ne was pale and agitated.

"Is it what Monsieur de Thauziat said to you that is troubling you so?" she asked gently, taking her companion's hand.

"Yes," was all H  l  ne answered.

"He told you that he loved you?"

"He asked me to be his wife."

There was another silence between them. Emilie's heart beat so wildly that it felt as though it would burst its

bonds. The terrible moment had come, the moment when all her courage and all her honour were to be put to the proof. Morally she felt calm and mistress of herself, and her anguish was not so great as she might have feared. She was transported by a thirst for self-sacrifice, a longing for martyrdom which rendered tolerable the torture of hearing that the man she loved loved another, and of hearing it from this very other woman's lips. Her body quivered, but her mind, throwing off its fleshly chains, rose pure and proud above all human suffering, and she felt a thrill of pride and intense delight at finding herself so noble and so great. It was her soul's sublime revenge for her physical inferiority and disgrace.

"Louis also loves you," she resumed. "He has never told you so, but you must know it."

"I do know it."

"Then is that the cause of your agitation and your trouble?"

"In my whole life, which has yet been filled with serious and painful events, I have never found myself obliged to decide about anything of so grave a nature. I have fought against dejection and despair; I have struggled against poverty and temptation; I have always had courage and decision; but then my own interests alone were in question. The resolutions that I took in no way influenced the future or affected the happiness of others. As long as you have only yourself to consider and answer for, you are brave; but as soon as you feel the weight of a moral responsibility upon your shoulders, you hesitate as to the course to pursue. For an hour this evening have I listened to Monsieur de Thauziat's words of love, and for two months have I seen

Monsieur Hérault become daily more assiduous in his attentions to me, although I have offered him no encouragement. The heads of most girls would be turned by such a triumph as to be loved by these two men. Most women would be delighted, but to me it is a source of sadness. My answer must of necessity cause grief and disappointment to one or the other, and I ask myself if it would not be better for me to leave this house, where I shall only have occasioned sorrow and vexation."

"But what difference would it make if you did go away? Do you imagine that Thauziat and Louis would be unable to find you again? Or is it that you do not wish to marry? If that is so, there is an end of the thing, and there will only be two unfortunates instead of one. But if you are not sworn to celibacy, then you ought to make your choice and either accept Thauziat or allow Louis to make his declaration."

Emilie uttered these last words as rapidly as if they burnt her lips. Then, passing her hand over her forehead, she said in her bantering way:

"Come, my dear, do you intend to be an old maid?"

"In the humble position in which I was, I never thought of marrying, but I feel no repugnance at the thought of becoming a wife."

"Well then?"

"It is not merely by choice that I have spoken to you on this subject. I have just had a proof that Monsieur Hérault has no secrets from you, and I am aware that you know Monsieur Thauziat, who is so intimate with your father, extremely well. You have shown me sympathy, and I think you like me. Then, do me a great service.

Dissipate the darkness with which I am surrounded by the light of your reason. Help me with your advice."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Emilie, but her laugh was forced. "Is that what you want me to do? You wish me to tell you to which of your two lovers to give the apple? Ha, ha! It is the judgment of Paris reversed, and I, of course, am Venus? Upon my word, a charming idea! Louis or Thauziat? Thauziat or Louis? What is the good of choosing? Why not toss for them?"

Her laughter, which had become almost convulsive, died away in a sob.

"Good heavens! What is the matter," cried Hélène in terror, as she caught Emilie by the shoulders, thinking she was going to faint.

"Nothing," replied Mademoiselle Lereboulley, pushing her friend away. "Leave me to myself, and do not speak to me. I am only foolish. I shall be better in a moment."

She drew out her handkerchief and hid her face to prevent Hélène, who was gazing at her in amazement, seeing her tears. For some minutes she wept bitterly, clinging to the iron rail to keep herself from falling, then, wiping her eyes with a gesture of pride, she turned her pale but tranquil face towards Mademoiselle de Graville:

"You have done right to come to me," she said; "for from no one could you have received advice more frank or more disinterested. You have lived in constant companionship with Louis, and you know his character exactly. His is essentially a superficial nature, and he has nothing more in him than you can see. He is good-hearted but very weak, and, incapable of wilfully hurting anyone, he could yet make a woman intensely miserable from mere thought-

lessness. As he has no strength of character, it is impossible for him ever to break a bad resolution. If he had anyone to exercise a good influence over him he would soon become a good and upright man, but with pernicious surroundings he could be most harmful to others and himself. He is simply a child who has to be guided, and who, perhaps, will not obey. The other—whom you know less, for his nature is complicated and reserved—is the very opposite of Louis. With his arm to lean upon, a woman would be sure of passing through life without sorrow or danger, for he would devote all his moral and physical energies to making the existence of her he loved happy and secure. When he has told you he loves you, when he has given you his word and his name, he will be faithful to you until death. He is indeed a man, and he will mount as high as he aspires. Until now he has always reached every end he has desired, and he will continue to overcome every obstacle in his path. I believe he is able to do everything, except, alas ! compel you to love him. But, mark me well, now you have the choice between Thauziat and Louis, do not hesitate, do not be so foolish as to hesitate. Stretch out your hand to Thauziat blindly and with closed eyes, simply because I tell you to do so. With him your life will be noble, happy, and envied. He loves you ; do not be mad enough to refuse him. To possess the love of such a man is the dream of every woman's heart. You have deserved it, and it is offered you ; accept it, and it will become the joy of your whole life."

As she spoke she had become eager and animated, a flush had risen to her cheeks, a light came into her eyes. Hélène had listened to her, carefully weighing her

every word, and when she had described Louis as weak and easily led as a child a melancholy smile had passed over her face ; when she had depicted Thauziat in all his superb power she had bent her head.

“Thank you,” she answered simply. “I shall never forget the proof of friendship you have just given me.”

Emilie bowed her head, and without another word returned to the drawing-room. She bid adieu to Madame Hérault, pressed Louis’ hand, and, taking her father’s arm, went down to their carriage. Monsieur de Thauziat had left about an hour before, and, when Monsieur and Mademoiselle Lereboulley had gone, the remaining guests began to take leave. Louis went to see them off, while his grandmother remained in the drawing-room with Hélène.

“Well, my dear,” said the old lady, cheerily, “it has been a most successful day and everything has gone off as well as I could wish, thanks to you.”

“Is everything really as you wish, madame ?” asked Hélène.

“Everything, my dear, and I hope the future will be a continuation of the present. I am very old and life does not hold much more in store for me, therefore I ought not to expect much from the future, and all that I do ask is that it shall be as now. All I hope is that I shall not become too tiresome for you to stay with me, and that when I cease to breathe you and Louis will be beside me to close my eyes.”

“Why finish such a happy day with such sad thoughts ?” said Hélène.

“It depends on you to make them joyful, my dear

child," said the old grandmother. "I express my desire, fulfil it. Since you have been with me all my worries have vanished, and I have been entirely happy. My happiness is, I believe, in a great measure owing to you. You do not know how pleasant it is at my age to have nothing but a feeling of tranquil security. Promise me that you will always look upon me as indeed your grandmother and that you will never leave me."

She had drawn the young girl to her and had clasped her in her arms. Hélène saw the tears running down the old woman's withered cheeks and her heart yearned towards her. She thought of Madame Hérault's first visit to her in her attic, she remembered, in one instant, all the proofs of affectionate kindness she had received from her, and slipping almost to her knees—

"I promise I will be a daughter to you," she said, solemnly.

She felt Madame Hérault's lips on her forehead, she heard her murmur, "Ah, if only you would—" then she quickly rose to prevent the confidence, and when Louis came in he found her standing up, apparently unmoved.

"Is every one gone?" she asked.

"Yes, every one," he replied.

"Then we had better go to bed. Madame Hérault must be very tired."

And hastening the good-nights to avoid any questions from Louis, whose burning curiosity she could guess, she led the old lady from the room.

It was in vain that the young man followed Madame Hérault to her chamber hoping to keep her up and thus find an opportunity of opening his heart; Mademoiselle de Graille

quietly and skilfully evaded all but indifferent subjects of conversation. Then, inwardly cursing women's intense blindness (for he thought *Hélène* could not perceive his anxiety) and his own stupidity for letting things drift, he went to his own room in the depths of despair, and passed a sleepless, feverish night.

Neither did *Mademoiselle de Graville* obtain much rest. Instead of peacefully falling asleep, as she generally did, she lay wide awake, again carefully going over the events of the day. Tired and exhausted, she longed to recruit herself with sleep, but the thoughts that kept passing tumultuously through her brain prevented her closing her eyes. She could see *Clément* bending over her as he told her of his love, his sombre face becoming gradually radiant and superb. He was no longer the indifferent, contemptuous *Thauziat* she had hitherto known, but a tender, adoring lover, whose fascination it was almost impossible to resist. With what eloquence had he described the torment he suffered when he had fled from her, hoping that absence would make him forget her! But, instead of weakening his affection, his self-imposed exile had increased it tenfold. Everywhere he could see *Hélène*, on the bank of a torrent, on the mountain heights, in the forest depths. And he had been forced to own to himself that he had borne her away with him in his heart, and that never again would her image leave him. He had at last understood that it was his fate to love her henceforth and for ever, and, relinquishing the struggle, he had returned to throw himself at her feet.

As he uttered these words he had bent still lower, and by the flashes of light from the illuminations she could see his

noble face glowing with passion. He was right, his pride had at last given way, he loved and he rejoiced in this love which made him a slave. She had made no answer, and then, with words of marvellous power he had told her of his hopes for the future, of his dreams of ambition and of fortune, and suddenly, she had felt as if she were being uplifted to dizzy heights. To his limitless mind, nothing seemed inaccessible; he was bound to reach every summit and to see the world at his feet. He would yield to Lereboulley's persuasions, enter political life and present himself as a candidate at the next elections, and she felt sure he would soon be among the foremost men of his time, and that he would hold an equally high position in Parliament as he did in society. The sign of a conqueror was on his forehead, and who would be able to resist him? Those whom he did not fascinate he would rule by force. Was she also about to surrender and thus give him the victory he desired the most ardently of all?

Her prejudices had vanished. At this moment she admired and liked him, and she understood now that what had seemed strange to her in his mode of action and thought was but the result of the originality of his mind and the superiority of his character. His slightly disdainful tone, the haughtiness of his bearing were easily accounted for by the indifference with which he must regard those who surrounded him, and only served to make his humility before her the more flattering, and to add to the delightful sense of self-satisfaction she felt at having at last vanquished this proud warrior and at being the queen to whom this determined rebel at last paid homage.

But suddenly Louis' pale face appeared before her eyes and

a pain shot through her heart. In the intoxication of her triumph she had forgotten the weak, inconsistent, young man. As far as she could remember, he had not made the slightest attempt to struggle against Clément; it was as though he had acknowledged himself conquered in advance, and had resigned himself to his defeat. And indeed how could he have withstood such an adversary? Was he not destined to the rôle of attendant satellite, was it not his fate to follow dull and unnoticed in the wake of the more brilliant star? Wherever Clément showed strength and vigour, there did Louis display his weakness. On the one side there was all which proves the human being's possession of a divine and superior essence, on the other, all which attests the earthly infirmity of man. The contrast was too marked not to terrify the woman who had to make her choice, for, as Emilie had said, it lay between a man and a child.

Her friend's words returned to her mind as they had been spoken—"Do not hesitate, but stretch out your hand to Thauziat." And yet she did not feel herself irresistibly forced to give it him. An immense pity for Louis who was so weak and so abandoned to himself, was springing up in her heart. And then, beyond the child, she could see the grandmother, and she asked herself if she was going to forsake them both when they counted so fondly on her attachment and devotion. He also loved her as did Thauziat, in a way that was certainly not so flattering to her pride, but perhaps his affection was the gentler, and the sweeter. He had contented himself with merely loving and had not uttered any words, but his supplicating looks were full of eloquence. Since she had entered the household, Louis' conduct had changed, as if by magic. He no longer left

his grandmother, of whom she was the constant companion, and was always beside her—Hélène—gazing at her and apparently living but for her alone. Was it not also a triumph to have led this *mauvais sujet* to a better mode of life? Unlike Thauziat, he had offered no resistance, but had bent his head beneath the yoke at once. Not for an instant had he hesitated, but from the first day, the first minute, he had loved her and thought of nothing else but loving her.

She remembered him when he was in mourning, looking delicate and sad; should she then bring back once more the sorrow to his face, and make him mourn, this time, his love? Besides, was it not for his sake that she had consented to live with the Héraults? She had not listened when his grandmother spoke to her of the gratitude she owed the Gravilles, she had only thought of this gentle, melancholy young man, for whom she had regretfully ceased to look from her window, and whom she would have been really pleased to see again. It was not the grandmother with whom she had gone to live, it was the grandson, and, that very first evening, how her heart had throbbed when he came in! What a charm she had found in his voice when he spoke! She had lived beside him without any transports of joy, only with a calm, even happiness, and perhaps it was this very absence of passionate, palpitating agitation which had prevented her perceiving that she loved him. But she knew now that her heart was his, and as she thought of how if she left him he might be unhappy and perhaps return to his old life, her heart ached and scalding tears flowed down her cheeks.

And yet Emilie's words still rang in her ears—"If you would be happy, give your hand to Thauziat. Louis is

weak, and if he fell under pernicious influence he would do much harm to others and himself." But, in her heart of hearts, there was a voice which answered—"The influence will not be pernicious, since it will be your own. You will lead him to happiness by the paths of virtue. It will be so if you choose; and cannot anyone carry out what they are determined to do?" And in her ears rang sonorous and imperious, as it had done each time she had had a serious decision to make, the word which seemed the motto of her life—"Will! Will!" In vain did she try to reflect or to argue with herself; she could still hear this word which imposed itself on her reason like a divine command.

Then she felt calmer, and at last fell asleep just as the dawn was whitening her windows.

She did not awake until late, and it was quite ten o'clock before she went to Madame Hérault's room. The latter was already dressed and moving briskly about.

"You have done quite right to be lazy, my dear," she said. "You were tired, and you do not look very well now. I don't know what is the matter with Louis; he went off for a walk in the woods hours ago."

Hélène made no answer, though she knew very well what was the cause of the young man's restlessness. She went into the hothouses with Madame Hérault, and until twelve o'clock listened with deaf ears to the discourses of the old lady on the different plants and the various methods of cultivating them. For the first time since they had been at Boissise Louis did not put in an appearance at the mid-day meal, and the two ladies lunched by themselves. His absence made Madame Hérault anxious and she asked if

anyone had seen him, but none of the servants had noticed him come in. At this reply she glanced inquiringly at Hélène, who said quietly—

“No doubt he has walked farther than he intended, and, finding what o’clock it is, has stayed to lunch at the farm.”

“Perhaps so,” answered Madame Hérault, without much conviction in her tone. “He has seemed very worried the last two days; I hope he has not come to any harm.”

“Oh, no, madame; do not be anxious. I am sure nothing has happened, and that he will give a very simple explanation of his absence.”

About four o’clock the two ladies were sitting working in the small drawing-room, when a carriage drove up to the door, with Emilie driving and Thauziat seated beside her. Mademoiselle Lereboulley threw the reins to the groom and, taking the hand Clément offered her, sprang to the ground, while Hélène advanced to meet them. The two girls kissed each other, but Thauziat only bowed to Mademoiselle de Graille with grave adoration, and then slowly went up the steps towards her.

“You told him ‘to-morrow,’” whispered Emilie to her friend, with a glance at Clément, “and he would not even wait until this evening; so here he is, trembling with suspense. It is certainly the first time he has ever experienced such sensations; are you not proud of having inspired such love?”

Hélène sadly shook her head and made no reply. They all three went into the drawing-room, but in a few minutes Emilie skilfully drew Madame Hérault out of the room, and Mademoiselle de Graille and Thauziat were left alone. For a moment they felt embarrassed, then Clément roused himself and said, with a smile—

"I am not a very patient creditor, am I? But you must blame yourself for my eagerness. By placing myself under stricter restraint I could have stayed away longer and have given you more time to reflect, but I wish to act with perfect frankness, and, at the risk of displaying the deficiencies in my character, to appear to you exactly as I am."

Then as Mademoiselle de Graville was about to reply, he stopped her by a gesture of entreaty.

"Oh, I implore you not to answer yet. Before I came I was all anxiety to hear your decision, and now I am beside you I fear to learn my fate. It seems to me that I have not pleaded my cause with sufficient eloquence, and I am tempted to repeat yet again how I adore you that you may the better understand the pain you will inflict upon me if you tell me you cannot return my love."

"I know all that is needful for me to know," replied Hélène, "and it would be useless to add another word. I am neither careless nor frivolous, and I can appreciate at their full worth the sentiments of a man such as you. If I had had any doubts as to your qualities, the respect and esteem of all those whom I see with you would have dissipated them; but I wanted no other eyes but my own to discover how high I ought to place you in my estimation. I am not speaking mere words of flattery; you have been frank with me, I will be the same with you. Learn, then, that it has made me very proud to find that you have chosen me from among so many others, and if pride could influence my decision, perhaps I should now be led to give you my hand—"

"Hélène!" cried Clément, turning pale as death. "Hélène, for what answer are you preparing me?"

“For one which I have enough regard for you and sufficient confidence in your generosity to wish to convey to you myself. Just now you were entreating me, now it is my turn to entreat you. Promise me that whatever favour I demand you will grant it me.”

“I will grant you everything,” he exclaimed passionately, “except to give up loving you.”

Mademoiselle de Graville raised her beautiful, suppliant eyes to his face, and holding out to him her hands which he did not dare take within his own—

“But you will love me as a true and devoted friend. The love you now have for me, and which, perhaps, will quickly die out like too bright a flame, must become a solid and lasting affection. Oh, I wish I could make you understand how happy I should be if you would yield to my prayer, and how grateful I should be to you for exhibiting so much grandeur of soul. You are the only man whom I dare ask to make such an effort over himself, because, perhaps, you are the only one whom I think capable of doing such a thing. I entreat you to let us put an end to this situation, so painful for us both, and leave it behind us, you, strengthened by generous resolutions, I, with my heart full of an affection I will prove to you during my whole life.”

But he stood silent, his head bowed upon his chest.

“You do not reply?” asked Hélène with terrible anxiety.

“Of what are you thinking?” she added gently.

“Of the dreams I had had,” answered Clément, “and which, in one second, have vanished for ever. And yet is it possible that I am quite indifferent to you, and that I cannot make you love me? May I not cherish the slightest

hope? Are you quite sure of your own mind? Or do you love another?"

It was H  l  ne now who made no answer. He was intently watching her, and as he stood, with his tall figure drawn up to its fullest height and his face clouded over, he looked the same as when, in her eyes, he personified Louis' bad genius. All her former impressions returned to her mind, and once again she divined the immense amount of good or evil of which he was capable. At this moment the evil seemed to prevail, and the kindness and gentleness had disappeared from his face as the light fleecy clouds vanish from the mountain's brow before the storm wind.

"I have promised Madame H  rault not to leave her," said H  l  ne at last, "and you know that I shall thus be only paying a debt of gratitude. She could not have been kinder to me than she has been, and I shall always find a pleasure in living with her until her last moments."

"Why not be frank and brave enough to tell the truth," broke in Thauziat. "You are not staying here for the sake of Madame H  rault, but for Louis! You love him, it is he you prefer to me. Dare you deny to me that it is so?"

At this challenge Mademoiselle de Graville rebelled, and looking Thauziat full in the face—

"You want the truth? Then you shall be satisfied. Yes, I do love him!"

"What has he done to deserve your love?" asked Cl  ment bitterly.

"He is weak and needs protection."

"Say, rather, that he is cowardly and vicious."

“Then I will be his courage and his virtue.”

“If he finds you are his superior, he will hate you.”

“Knowing that I have done all for the best, I will suffer without a murmur.”

“Do you think I will allow you to sacrifice yourself in this way?”

“By what right would you interfere?” exclaimed *Hélène* angrily. “I think you are taking unwarrantable liberties! Until now I have allowed you to speak to me freely, but, if you take advantage of my good nature to threaten me, I will never consent to listen to you again.”

“Forgive me,” cried *Clément*, “my suffering is so great that I forget myself and offend you. And yet God knows how I love you! I want to put you on your guard against the dangers of which you are so rashly running the risk, and you refuse to understand my meaning. If I depict *Louis* to you as I know him, you will only accuse me of perfidy and treachery, and yet I cannot let you ruin your whole existence. The world, which you are bound to enter and of which you are ignorant, is strewn with snares and pitfalls, and is full of nothing but lies and deceit. You will be cruelly wounded if you have no one to protect you, and *Louis*—*Louis*! You intend to confide yourself to the care of him who stands in so much need of protection himself?”

Hélène put her hand on *Thauziat*’s arm, and said, with a smile—

“Well, then, if he has so much need of protection, he will have mine and, if needs were, yours.”

Clément started back.

“Never!” he cried, furiously. “I could not see you his without hating him!”

"That is just what I will not have," said Mademoiselle de Graville firmly. "You must give me your word of honour that you will forget all you have said to me the day I marry Louis, and that we—Louis and I—shall always have a friend in you."

He shook his head, but she bent towards him with her charming grace, and, forcing him to look at her, said—

"Promise, and I shall like you so much."

Again he shook his head ; then, with an effort—

"I would do anything in the world to please you, but I am only a man, and you must not ask divine virtues of me. No, it would be impossible for me to forgive him the pain I shall have to endure through him, though I know he will be the innocent cause of it. I can see how unjust I am, but you cannot prevent his happiness being a source of suffering to me, or me being jealous of him. For yourself, you may be sure that you will always have my fidelity and devotion. I shall love you as long as I live, with the last hope that, having seen the worthlessness of the man on whom you have lavished your affection, you may return to me. I shall always be ready to accept on my knees the love I am imploring and you are refusing. A man of my nature does not know the meaning of change. I love you to-day, I shall love you to-morrow, I shall never cease to love you ~~le~~ what will happen."

"And I," said Hélène gravely, "I am a woman who does not give her heart twice over. Such as you find me to-day, such you will find me ten years hence."

He made a step towards her as though to beseech her. Then, understanding that entreaty was useless, he uttered a cry of despair, and, bowing before her, left her. She,

with clouded face and dreamy eyes, went out on the terrace, avoided Madame Hérault and Emilie who were hastening to rejoin Thauziat near the carriage, and, longing for silence and solitude, turned towards the sombre alleys of the park.

When she had passed the lakes she seated herself on a grassy bank, and began to think. So Clément, like Emilie, warned her against her own heart, and told her of the dangers of a union with Louis. Although she knew he was sincere in his advice, Thauziat's animosity was explicable—he loved her. But Emilie, Hérault's friend and daily companion, also said, "Do not marry Louis, you will be unhappy!" It seemed to Hélène that she was on the edge of a precipice of immeasurable depth. At the very bottom gleamed a bright spark, which was surely hope. But was there any chance of escape from this gulf once she let herself slide? And if not, then why should she take one more step forward? She was free, she need not expose herself to this danger. One word and all would be finished; should she hesitate to pronounce this word? Was she afraid of poverty, now she had lived in luxury? No, she knew she could return to her work and her life of privation without a murmur. But the old grandmother, to whom she had promised to be a devoted daughter, would then be forsaken, and, after having accustomed her to every affectionate care, could she leave her alone, deprived of every little tenderness? And Louis, who had been so sad and discouraged for the last two days, would be again abandoned to himself if she went away.

At this thought she could have wept. She was sure that if she disregarded Emilie's and Clément's advice, she must be prepared for the most poignant sorrows; but again the

voice within her repeated, "Be bold and courageous. Face the danger, and you will vanquish it by your will." And down in the black gulf which seemed ready to swallow her up she saw the little bright spark growing and increasing and mounting towards her, and gradually the dark chasm became blue, and it seemed to Hélène that before her eyes stretched the immense canopy of Heaven.

From that moment her resolution was taken. She had a conviction that she would surmount every obstacle, and that, in defending her own happiness, she would be defending that of the beings she loved, and her heart felt lighter. She felt rested and calm, and she sat still in silent enjoyment of the tranquillity within and around her.

A slight noise among the bushes attracted her attention, and looking up she saw Louis in the middle of the path. He was very pale, but drops of perspiration were standing on his forehead, and fragments of grass and moss were clinging to his clothes as though he had been lying on the ground. He came up to Hélène, and said in a trembling voice—

"I did not think of meeting you here, but I will go away again. My presence would be *de trop*, no doubt."

"Why should you think so?" asked Hélène.

"Ever since yesterday you have carefully avoided me," he answered bitterly. "Therefore I must conclude that I am displeasing to you, or that another pleases you better."

"I do not understand you."

"I have just seen the carriage in which Emilie and Monsieur de Thauziat came drive off."

"Oh, it is Monsieur de Thauziat you have in your mind, is it?" said Hélène, with a smile. "Well, he is gone, and I don't expect he will come back."

Louis drew closer to her with a gesture of delight, and unable to contain himself,

“Then you do not love him?”

“Do you think everyone who meets him is absolutely compelled to fall in love with him?”

He turned yet paler than before, and, dropping on his knees beside her, held out his cold, trembling hands to her.

“How you have made me suffer!” he murmured. “But what did he really ask you yesterday, for of course I knew it was not about your common acquaintances you had been talking?”

“Yesterday, he asked me if I would be his wife,” replied Hélène softly; “and to-day—”

She stopped, enjoying to the full the emotion with which Louis, whose very breath seemed suspended, was overcome.

“To-day?” he repeated.

Hélène’s face shone with inexpressible love, and in tones which sounded like heavenly music in the ears of the man who loved her, she replied:

“To-day, I have told him that I shall never leave your grandmother’s house.”

“Hélène!” cried Louis, and his eyes filled with tears.

She was beside him, delighted at his joy, smiling to see him weep. Passionately he took her in his arms, and clasping her to him as if he still feared his claim might be disputed—

“Ah, how I love you,” he whispered, “and how happy you have made me!”

She gently disengaged herself from his embrace, and in almost maternal fashion brushed away the tears from his eyes. Then, rising, she took his arm, and, leaning on each other, they slowly returned to the château.

CHAPTER VII.

THE marriage between Louis Hérault-Gandon and Mademoiselle de Graille was performed under the happiest auspices. The bridegroom's grandmother was wild with delight, and the bride had no relations to be vexed because a poor but well-born girl was marrying a man immensely wealthy but connected with trade. Hélène's settlements were carried out in princely fashion, but the Héraults' family lawyer, who had been obliged to thoroughly look into their affairs before drawing up the marriage contract, did not attempt to conceal from Louis that his bachelor extravagance had greatly decreased his fortune. He still had the factory and the Boissise estate, without counting the personal possessions of old Madame Hérault; but what would constitute a magnificent income for people of modest habits is only what is strictly necessary for those accustomed to live in grand style. Luxury entails tremendous expenses, and many fashionable families have to exercise greater economy and care in the distribution of their incomes than has the head of the ordinary middle-class household.

Hélène at once realised the demands of the social position which she now occupied, and with marvellous clearness of perception and good judgment she arranged the household expenses so as not to reduce the way in which the family had always lived, but also so as not to spend more than the income really at their command. She amazed her husband

by her prudence and decision, and transported with delight old Madame Hérault, who had never been able to keep accounts.

Louis seemed on the way to becoming another man. To please his wife he had again applied himself to business and now went to Saint-Denis more regularly than ever, and none of the unfavourable prognostics which had been uttered were realised by the young couple. It is true that the honeymoon was hardly over and that six months' hard work was not much to ask from so great a love as Louis'. That he worshipped his wife and saw everything through her eyes there could be no doubt, and Emilie was stupefied. She would never have believed Hérault capable of so lasting an affection. Caprices, loves which died out as suddenly as they had sprung into existence, so well and good; that was as much as could be expected from a man physically so nervous, morally so frivolous. A strong, lasting affection was indeed something new, and Hélène had worked a miracle.

The winter which followed her marriage was one long delight for the young wife. Her husband, tired of society, had dropped the acquaintances his father had made; but now, proud of Hélène, and anxious to see her admired, he again sought them out, and added to their number other and new friends, with the help of Lereboulley who knew everyone in Paris. All its bygone splendours were restored to the Hérault mansion, which, gleaming with light, opened wide its doors to the guests who flocked thither in crowds. With her simple, easy grace, Hélène showed herself a perfect hostess, and the most malicious could find nothing to criticise in the behaviour of this charming favourite of fortune, though, for all that, she was not permitted to go

Scot-free ; for perfection, in the eyes of many people, is the worst of all faults. But there was no truth in the sayings of her detractors, and it only needed their attacks to make young Madame Hérault's admirers her fanatic champions. She had many more enthusiastic friends than half-hearted foes, and, as the world always takes the opinion of the majority, Hélène was placed amongst the people who are a success.

She was glad to find herself received with favour, especially because of Louis, whose vanity exulted. In his character vanity held a prominent position, and he was one of those men who will ruin themselves to have it said that they possess the handsomest house, the fastest horses, the best shooting and the prettiest wife. Fortunately for him, he had the cleverest as well as the prettiest wife, and she prevented him committing a great many follies. He had always followed someone else. Formerly it was Thauziat who guided him and led him into all sorts of extravagance, with his lordly ways of despising money ; but Thauziat was no longer his hourly companion, for since the day he had left Boissise, wounded to the heart, he had kept away, to Hélène's delight.

His absence was indeed a relief to her, for since she had penetrated Louis' most secret thoughts young Madame Hérault knew what a sovereign influence Clément had exercised over him. She also understood that it needed but a word for him to resume his sway again, since, after hating Thauziat with all his jealous strength, Louis, now his love was successful, felt quite as friendly towards him as of old. Besides, even if he had had good cause of hatred, was Hérault capable of hating anyone long ? With his

fickle nature, every sensation was passing, and, unfortunately, the noblest and most delicate were the least enduring. Therefore, it was with great uneasiness that the young wife had consented to pay a ceremonious visit to the Lereboulleys soon after her marriage, for Thauziat was an intimate friend of theirs, and she feared meeting him. She confessed her dread to Emilie, who began to reproach her for calling so seldom, but at the first words she uttered Mademoiselle Lereboulley interrupted her.

“You have nothing to fear,” she said. “You evidently do not know Clément. He will keep away from you, and will not utter a word which could by any chance displease or make you uneasy. He is very unhappy, though no one would think it such is the extraordinary command he has over himself.”

And, in truth, whenever Hélène met Thauziat at a ball or evening party, he avoided her, and within a quarter of an hour, after staying just long enough to avoid drawing attention to the coincidence of his departure with Madame Hérault's arrival, he had left the house. This behaviour was so uniform that Louis was put out by it. He thought his old friend shunned him too persistently. Because they had been rivals, was that a reason why their acquaintance should cease? He bore no grudge against Clément, and why should Clément bear one against him? To give way to despair for six months was quite long enough, a love grief ought never to last longer, and was it not easy enough for this lady-killer, so little accustomed to defeat, to find consolation? Were not all the women eager to make him forget the cruelty which he so bitterly resented?

He reproached Hélène for not favouring the reconcilia-

tion and for being unfriendly towards Thauziat, but on that point he found her deaf to all his arguments. She declared that it was useless to seek each other out again after so long a separation, and, besides, reconciliations never lasted long after so decided a rupture; there are moral wounds which are never thoroughly healed. In any case, it was not Louis' place to make the first advances. If Monsieur de Thauziat came back to them in a frank and friendly way, she certainly would not repel him; but his systematic avoidance of them was a proof that he had not forgotten, and therefore it was better to leave him to his ill-temper.

"Are you afraid he might make love to you?" asked Louis, with the slightly bantering security of a man who knows himself beloved.

"Perhaps I am," answered Hélène, gravely, for she did not wish to confess that it was a great deal more for Louis' sake than her own that she feared a renewal of the intimacy with Thauziat. However chance freed her from this anxiety.

About the middle of winter Lereboulley set off for Smyrna, whither he was bound to assure himself of the advantages of a company that was being formed to establish a service of steamers between Marseilles and the Syrian coast, and on his way the senator intended to stop at Corinth to see the site chosen to commence cutting through the isthmus. He took Thauziat with him, and they and Sir James went on a yacht the latter had just bought to please his wife. The *Sirène* was one of the prettiest pleasure yachts in Europe. Of about four hundred tons burden she could do her fifteen knots, and her former owner, Lord Mellivan Grey, had only sold her to Sir James

because, stricken down by the death of his daughter, he no longer took any pleasure in travelling.

When Sir James told him of his acquisition, Lereboulley had gone almost mad with rage. This was a very different matter from buying knick-knacks and pictures, and a yacht wasn't a thing that could be stood on a whatnot in a drawing-room. Then, besides the purchase money, there would be endless expenses in connection with it; it would need a captain to command it, a crew to manage it, coal to get up steam; and for a whole fortnight Lereboulley never opened his mouth save to say something bad about the boat.

"If it was even worth anything!" he said to Sir James. "But it's sure to turn out an old tub, which will go to the bottom at the first breath of wind. And you offer to take me on it with you! Why you must be mad, simply mad! And I hope your wife will not risk her life on board it. Unless she is out of her senses she will remain on land, and then if you go to the bottom of the sea, Sir James, we shall lament you, but at any rate you will not have dragged that poor Diana down with you."

He furiously persisted in prophesying that a disaster would surely come to pass. One could feel that he would have liked to be on the shore at the moment the *Sirène* was being swallowed up by the waves, to delight in the spectacle and to assure himself that his extravagant friend had not escaped. But Sir James was not in the least put out, and replied with his usual phlegm—

"It was Diana who bought the yacht, and she is delighted at the idea of going to the Mediterranean on board it. Besides, it's a very pretty boat, and as safe as possible."

"An old tub, I tell you, an old tub," growled Lereboulley ; "and you'll all be drowned. I won't go on it at any rate."

"It will turn out a very good speculation," resumed Sir James. "I shall sell it for more than I gave."

Lereboulley sprang to his feet, unable to contain himself at such an idea.

"A good speculation ! A boat cheap at four hundred thousand francs ! Do you hear, Sir James, four hundred thousand francs ! You don't seem to know what four hundred thousand francs means ; but it will have to be paid, and you'd better think it over !"

"I believe I told you when the first payment is due."

"Upon my word I admire your coolness, I do, indeed," stammered Lereboulley, choking with rage.

At that Sir James, his patience exhausted, advanced towards the senator with so ferocious an air that the latter, calming down as if by magic, uttered nothing more but confused interjections, and did not dare to blame any further the man of whom he stood in such wholesome awe. In the end, Diana declared, with her most charming smile, that she was pleased, and that was an argument which generally put an end to even the most violent discussions between Sir James and Lereboulley.

At length the yacht arrived at Havre. It was perfectly appointed, and Lady Olifaunt having proposed a trip along the shores of the Mediterranean, the senator took advantage of the proposal to go to Smyrna. It would be an agreeable way of passing a few weeks with Diana and of getting some return for his money, while his journey would be turned into a pleasure party. But the arrangement was

discussed a little more than Lereboulley, who had the greatest regard for appearances on account of Lady Olifaunt's social position, liked; and Emilie, whose tongue knew no limits when Diana was in question, began to utter such atrocities, that soon all sorts of things were being said and thought about the expedition.

One evening, when someone was asking to what port Lady Olifaunt's yacht was to be steered, Emilie coolly replied—

“But is not its destination too clearly indicated for any information to be needed?”

“Why, what is its destination?”

“Cythera, naturally!”

These evidences of malice, which Lereboulley did not dare curb, as much from affection as from fear, for he both loved and dreaded his daughter, simply tortured him. He would have given Emilie whatever she chose to ask, if she would only have promised not to tear Diana with her sharp little claws and pointed teeth, but though she would not have owned the pleasure it gave her to tear to shreds the character of the beautiful woman who cost her father so dear, it was too intense for the girl to desist.

The result of this petty domestic warfare was to hasten the departure of the pleasure-seeking party, and one morning H  l  ne heard that Lereboulley was on the ocean and Thauziat with him.

The news completely reassured her and she became radiant with beauty and happiness. Generally, when one woman is the centre of attraction in a room, all the other women at once draw themselves up and cast the most evil of glances at their successful rival, but to H  l  ne was given

the rare privilege of being admired by men and yet not hated by women. They felt she would not take advantage of her power, and thence their indulgence. She never strove after effect but was always simply herself, and she could not have been more charming. She had but one ambition—that of binding her husband yet closer to her, and the strange result of her jealous care was to redouble her affection for Louis without increasing his for her. She was caught in her own snare, and from constantly concentrating her thoughts upon her handsome husband she came to adore him. He was certainly very much in love with her, but it must be owned that his caresses were more freely lavished the days his pride was flattered by the praise and admiration *Hélène* received.

An event which it was easy to foretell put a stop in some measure to the young wife's social successes; she found herself likely to become a mother, and had to impose certain restraints upon herself. *Madame Hérault* was intensely delighted, and Louis very properly joined in the general rejoicing. He was not passionately fond of children, but the thought of having a child of his own, especially if it should be a boy, touched a chord in his heart which had never before vibrated. He gave his wife ample proof of the real affection he had for her, and when she no longer cared to go out he passed all his evenings at home with her.

Once more the drawing-room of the *Hérault* mansion was the scene of sweet intercourse, such as that which had preceded the wedding, when Louis, attracted to his home by *Hélène's* presence, used to find time fly so quickly when he was seated beside her, that when at midnight his grand-

mother rose to go to her room, he usually exclaimed, "Already!" He was not now so ardent as he had been then, but that only made his conduct the more praiseworthy, for after a day passed at Saint-Denis with his managers and foremen he might have been excused for desiring a more exciting pleasure than that of an evening spent with his wife and grandmother. However, he sacrificed himself very good-temperedly, and if Helène said to him—

"It is dull for you here. Go to the theatre, there is a new piece on now."

"No," he would answer; "it will run a long while and we will go and see it together."

Then his wife would take him by the shoulders, gently smooth his fair hair with her soft, white hand, gaze into his blue eyes, and seeing him smiling and content kiss him with all the passion of happy love.

She used all her wits to prevent him feeling wearied. She was widely read, gifted with a fertile imagination and a brilliant conversationalist, and she succeeded in making Louis pass the time pleasantly enough. He perceived the efforts she made to amuse him, and admired and wondered at the culture of her mind. As she talked she constantly mentioned things of which he was ignorant, and men of whose existence he had never heard, and gradually he formed a very high opinion of his wife's mental abilities, and began to consult her, even on matters of business.

"If your grandfather had known me, he would have wanted me in his office," she would say sometimes laughingly. "And I should indeed have made an excellent accountant."

She took advantage of her husband's confidence to gradually learn the extent and workings of his trade. She discovered that besides the question of manufacture there was also one of speculation to influence the gains of the Saint-Denis works. The copper market was subject to considerable fluctuations, and as the price went up or down so was it better or worse for Hérault's trade, the aim naturally being to lay in a store of metal when it was cheap, and to prevent any depreciation in the value of the apparatus constructed. For the last few years the supply of copper had exceeded the demand, especially since the different nations had adopted steel for the construction of cannon in place of bronze, but in addition to this, many new mines had been discovered and Spain in particular had suffered a great loss to her revenues owing to the depreciation of the metal. Fortunately for Louis, Lereboulley had obtained for him a commission from the government to make the copper casings for cartridges, and at last the much talked-of cable from Brest to Panama was about to be put in hand.

Still, Hélène did not feel perfectly easy, for she had noticed Louis' tendency to speculate. He was always thinking out complicated combinations for making money by selling or buying copper in its rough state, instead of setting his every energy to work to place his factory above all others by the excellence of the work turned out from it. It was in this latter direction that his wife constantly urged him, stimulating him to throw aside his natural indolence, and trying to make him conquer his innate dislike for work. She knew he conscientiously did all he could to meet her wishes and she pitied him for having to struggle so hard to

overcome his habits, but she also knew that her happiness depended upon Louis being constantly occupied. Emilie told her so at every opportunity, though she did not need her friend's warnings to convince her of the fact.

Old Madame Hérault, who had never seen her grandson do anything save minister to his own pleasures, thought that Hélène had worked wonders with him and was almost ready to cry aloud that she had indeed performed a miracle, but soon she had another object on which to lavish her admiration—a great-grandson was born to her one evening about eleven o'clock, and, for the second time in his life, Louis wept for joy.

Seated at his wife's bedside, after she was rested and a little restored, and holding her hand in his, while, to the grandmother's intense delight, the new little Hérault drank orange-flower water out of a glass like a man, he passed one of the happiest hours of his life. Hélène lay back, pale and smiling, among the pillows and lace, saying nothing but gazing at her husband with the proud joy of a young mother. He had wished for a son, she had given him one, and, in return, she only asked him to be steady in order to assure their future happiness.

"Are you pleased?" she whispered.

"Yes," he replied, while his heart thrilled with love.

"Henceforth, you must be doubly good—for my sake and for his."

He made no answer in words, but, leaning down, he imprinted a kiss upon her forehead which was worth more than all the vows he could have uttered.

The following day, a consultation was held between the relations of the interesting patient and the doctor who was

attending her—the celebrated Rameau de Ferrières—upon the advisability of Madame Hérault suckling her child. She herself was most anxious to do so and the grandmother, who had brought up her own son, thoroughly approved her desire, but Louis raised some objections, and, for once, he alone displayed common sense. Rameau, when they asked him to decide the question, commenced by saying that Madame Hérault was perfectly “able” to nourish her child, and as to whether she “ought” to do so, he thought it needless to ask his opinion when it was so well known already. Deeply imbued as he was with socialistic principles, the physician quoted Jean-Jacques Rousseau and affirmed that if they would have the child well and strong it was absolutely necessary for it to draw its nourishment from the mother. Then, half seriously, half jokingly, he concluded—

“All women should be equal in the presence of maternity, as all men are before the law. A young woman has no more right to refuse to suckle her child than has a young man to refuse to serve his time. To bear children is the way in which a woman acquits herself of her debt to her country; to nourish them, the way in which she pays her debt to her family. Of course, one cannot force a woman who is physically unfit to do so to suckle her child, just as one does not require cripples or invalids to follow the flag. But, in that case, do not let us have a hired woman take the place of the mother; let us rather obtain the purest milk from an ass or a goat at the risk of making the child obstinate or capricious.”

Then turning to Hérault—

“And should you like your son to be so?”

Naturally Louis was obliged to say he would be deeply grieved to see his child either one or the other.

Disliking all discussion as he did, he would not draw Rameau aside to tell him that there were moral reasons against the plan which more than counterbalanced the physical ones in favour of it—for instance, that, until the child was weaned, there must necessarily be a difference in the relations between his wife and himself, and that he very much wished not to interrupt the intimacy which had hitherto assured their happiness. Entreated by *Hélène*, urged by the doctor, teased by his grandmother, who had not the remotest idea of the dangers she was rendering possible, Louis yielded. It was the first, perhaps the only error *Hélène* made in the battle she waged against life.

But with all her clearness of judgment she still wanted experience. She thought to bind her husband still closer to his home by making his child's arms his chains, never dreaming that it was herself alone she was fettering, and that once his home was changed into a nursery it would not long possess any attraction for this man of the world, hardly yet steadied down and always on the verge of breaking bounds. She acted for the best, as in this world people so often do, only to find their efforts lead to bad results, but unfortunately the line of conduct she adopted was not one which could be altered in a day, and during the time she would need to retrace her steps, how many bad habits could be resumed !

The young wife was not long in perceiving the immediate effects of her decision. When she again became able to resume her usual life, she tried in vain to draw her husband to her room. He had reinstalled himself in his bachelor

quarters, and, finding himself very comfortable there, told H  l  ne, in answer to her request, that considerations for the health of both mother and child forbade him acceding to her desire, and that to be free to have the baby brought her at all hours of the night she must be alone. He was tender but firm, and when he could find no good argument to use, he smiled affectionately. H  l  ne was forced to give in and found herself, as she had wished, inclosed in her maternity as in a fortress ; but she now saw that if the place was to be inexpugnable, it was of the first importance that her husband also should be within.

Still she had no cause for complaint. Louis' conduct was exemplary. His ardour for business matters increased. He desired to regain possession of most of the shares of his factory at Saint-Denis, and Lereboulley gave up his with a very good grace. Altogether, H  rault seemed to be on the way to perfecting what his grandfather had commenced, and to regaining by his hard work what he had dissipated by his idleness.

Spring had come and gone while such important events had been taking place, and now August was drawing to an end, H  l  ne, who had borne the heat of the summer very well, thanks to the fresh and verdant garden in the Faubourg Poissoni  re, expressed a wish to pass a few weeks at Boissise. There would be no need for Louis to bear the fatigue of a frequent journey between Evreux and Paris, for it was now the quietest time of the year for him and at the factory most of the engines stood idle, only a dull, continuous snort coming from the few still in motion as from an enormous animal stretched sleeping in the sun.

The young couple were delighted at finding themselves

once more at the place which possessed so many pleasant associations for them. Again they visited the park with its sombre alleys, the limpid lakes on which swam, slow and majestic, the snowy swans, the dazzling flower-gardens aglow with bright-hued flowers, the stone seat where they had exchanged the words which had bound them to each other for ever, and at each step they recalled the happy moments of the year before. Alone they walked amidst the silent woods where they used to walk with Emilie, and, forgetting the world and all that was not of themselves, lived a life of exquisite selfishness.

If, at this moment of her life, Hélène had been able to complete Louis' pure and moral enjoyment by pleasures less ethereal, if she had not been condemned to a platonic affection only she would doubtless have cast a net about him very difficult to escape. But all her physical grace, all her intellectual gifts could not recompense her young and ardent husband for the pleasures denied him; she was simply feeding a fire she was unable to extinguish, and the more charming she made herself the more she increased the danger.

On his return from his excursion to the East, Lereboulley had resumed the direction of his enormous financial transactions. His stay on board the *Sirène* had been prolonged a little longer than he had intended, but, once beside her, it was very difficult for him to resist Diana's caprices, and, if he had been sincere, he would have owned that he did not regret the time he had lost following, like a second Antony, this fascinating Cleopatra. After a few days Thauziat had regained all his former spirits, his face had lost the sombre expression it had worn at their departure, and to his

companions he was the same as he had always been—brilliant and witty ; but through all his conversation ran a vein of bitter misanthropy which was henceforth to be the characteristic of his mind, for this conqueror had experienced defeat, and all his life he was doomed to remember it with smarting regret. He never spoke of Louis or Hélène himself, and would allow no one else to do so in his presence ; and when Diana once ventured to discuss them, her words had met with so rough a reception that she did not care to try the experiment a second time.

It was plain that Thauziat's heart was not yet healed of its wound, and there was no question but that at some time or other this grief and this love could be turned to account. Lady Olifaunt often let her thoughts wander to the subject, and secretly she formed a plan of merciless revenge upon Louis, who had so insolently disdained her, and upon Hélène, who was so good, so proud, and so happy.

Lying on a pile of cushions in the fore-part of the boat under a canopy suspended from the rigging, the beautiful Englishwoman gazed at the azure sky and gave herself up to her cruel dreams, while Lereboulley played *béziq*ue and drank grog with Sir James, and Thauziat shot at sea-gulls for want of something better to do.

In this way they had reached Smyrna, visited Jerusalem and the Holy Land, stayed a while at the Golden Horn to see the fairy vision Constantinople presents and crossed the Grecian archipelago to land at the Piræus. Athens, to which they had looked forward as a marvel, they thought a dirty and insignificant little town and they weighed anchor disenchanted with Greece, which, from poets' descriptions, they had imagined so splendid and so grand,

and which they found to be in reality only a little country where grey was the predominating colour, and where the forests were only thickets, the rivers brooks and the cities villages.

"Greece only exists in the classics," Thauziat had said. "It is a chimerical land created by ancient literature. If you wish to find it you must not seek the south-east of Europe, but open your Homer and Sophocles, your Aristophanes, Thucydides and Herodotus. It is a bright phantom adorned with never-fading souvenirs which it is best to leave surrounded by the mists which are sacred to it; if you call it forth, you only see a horrible and fleshless skeleton draped with rags. Your Byron was a fool, Sir James, or rather a conceited man who wished to find out how much power he possessed over the minds of his contemporaries by trying to resuscitate this corpse. He was punished by his death."

"Byron was a very great poet; he got a guinea a line for his verses," returned Sir James, looking up from his cards for a moment.

"Bravo, Sir James! Poetic as usual!" cried Thauziat. "Lereboulley, aren't you going to mark sixty for your queens? Sir James is generally amiable enough to leave you the ladies."

Sight-seeing, conversing and backbiting, they slowly returned to Marseilles, reaching Paris in May—just when Hélène's cup of happiness was full.

Lereboulley went to the Senate a few times, spoke on one or two matters in which he was interested, pulled up the work which was behindhand, and, with a sharpness which cost the Stock Exchange dear, won back in a few weeks the money the *Sirène* had cost him.

As for Thauziat, never had he attracted more attention than during the first few weeks after his return to France. He was as if possessed by a demon. He openly carried on an intrigue with the wife of Baron Oppenger, the rich German banker, who has had such painful passages-at-arms with the police on questions of morality and seems in no-wise ashamed to own it. The papers, glad to get hold of anything so interesting, having told all about Thauziat's relations with the lady and invented a good many details to embellish the story, Clément called out and fought on two consecutive days two of the most venomous chroniclers of scandal, and stretched them one after the other on the grass. He kept bank all one night at the club and mulcted the punters of a hundred and forty thousand francs, which he divided the following day amongst charitable institutions. He won the great international steeplechase at Auteuil with "Braconnier," a horse he had bought for three thousand francs at a selling handicap at a flat race meeting and which he simply lifted over the obstacles at Auteuil. In short, every one was talking of him, and for a month he was the lion of society.

One evening, in the very zenith of his popularity, Lereboulley, who had waited in vain for him to keep an appointment he had with him, went to his house. Intimate as he was there, he told the footman there was no need to announce him and went straight into Thauziat's study, where, to his utter surprise, he found his friend stretched on a sofa weeping bitterly. Springing to his feet, Clément tried to persuade the senator he was mistaken, but the latter had seen too distinctly to be thus put off and endeavoured to make him reveal the cause of his grief.

Thauziat pretended not to understand his hints, spoke quite unconcernedly, was even able to joke in a few moments, and gave all the information required about the business which had caused Lereboulley's visit with the utmost clearness.

Then, after having been seen everywhere perhaps a little too frequently, he shut himself up alone in his own house a prey to such a fit of nervous irritability that he could hardly bear the light in the room³ he was in. At last, however, he recovered, and Lereboulley having decided to go to Evreux the following week, Clément accepted his invitation to go and stay with him.

Sir James and Lady Olifaunt, owing to a caprice of Diana's, were also to be the senator's guests. Emilie, who received the beautiful Englishwoman at her house in Paris, though she made her pay dearly for the condescension, had formally told her father that she would not be her hostess in the country, but after an exchange of words, entreating on Lereboulley's side and bitter on Emilie's, the father and daughter came to an arrangement, viz. :—that Lady Olifaunt's visit should last only a fortnight, and that during that time Emilie should go to Boissise, where Madame Hérault would be only too glad to have her.

For some time Mademoiselle Lereboulley had had a plan which she thought she could now put into execution. The little church at Theil—a very old Roman building—had once had the lower part of its walls adorned with curious paintings representing scenes from the Passion, but time had almost defaced them and in some places only faint traces of colour could now be discerned. Emilie had often said to the venerable old priest, whom she aided in his works of charity :

"Your pictures are in a terrible state, your reverence. I must come over one day with my brushes and make the figures look something like human beings."

But, with her many duties and her father's guests to monopolise her time, Emilie had never been able to find three weeks to devote to the restoration of the poor old church.

"This time," she thought, "I shall be able to work as long as I choose. It is only about two miles to Theil from Boissise through the woods, along paths kept like those of a private park." And the day after her arrival at her friend's house, she put her paint-box, brushes, mahl-sticks, and everything she might need into a carriage and set off early in the morning for her "day's work," as she gaily said. She was to eat the lunch she took with her in the vicarage garden, and the others were to join her in the afternoon to see the progress she had made.

The very day Mademoiselle Lereboulley first climbed her ladder in the church at Theil, Lady Olifaunt, Sir James, Thauziat and some young stock-brokers arrived at the senator's house.

The estate of the big man of the department was situated on the bank of the Iton, quite near Evreux. One extremity of the park, indeed, reached the outskirts of the town, while the other joined the Boissise woods. The house, built with part of the material of the old Château of Navarre by Lereboulley's father, dates from 1838, was a huge white building of the Louis XV. style with two wings and a flight of eight steps leading to the entrance-hall. The interior was a perfect marvel of luxury; indeed, there were so many of the most precious and most artistic objects crowded into the vast reception-rooms on the ground-floor that at

Evreux the senator's château was generally called "The Lereboulley Museum."

The park, formed of pieces of ground bought one after the other, had cost a fabulous sum to acquire, and Lereboulley often said to his guests as he took them to certain parts of his property :

" Here, my friends, tread with awe. We are walking on twenty-franc pieces."

This sixty-acre park, thickly planted with old trees, could compare favourably with that of Boissise, and flowers were there in still greater profusion even than at Madame Hérault's, the senator leaving everything in the hands of English gardeners who obtained the most successful results. The vineries were the admiration of amateur vine-growers all over Europe, and from May to the end of February the senator's table was provided with grapes grown in his own houses. Everything else was in proportion. Some years before Lereboulley had had a mania for pisciculture. The Iton flows through the park, feeding on its way a large sheet of water, and the water in the basins, which were graduated according to the age of the trout and connected with one another by cement canals, was always clear and fresh. Fine netting was placed at the mouth of each basin to keep in the young fish which were fed with sheep's brains and flies bred artificially, and a cascade falling a distance of thirty feet served to unite the basins to the lake, in which the silver fish could be seen glittering in the sun. Lereboulley, who always would obtain a result of some practical use even from a hobby, sent ten thousand trout to the Paris markets every Lent, and, as a joke, Thauziat once sent a letter to his friend addressed,

“Monsieur Lereboulley, Senator and Fishmonger,” to the indignation of all Evreux.

Installed in this sumptuous abode the senator's guests found their time fully occupied for two days in looking all over it. Then, their curiosity satisfied, they began to feel the torpor peculiar to every Parisian who has been absent from the Boulevards for eight-and-forty hours, until Lereboulley (who was monopolised by Sir James and was undergoing disastrous defeats at *bézique*) placed his stables at their disposal.

After that, every afternoon about three o'clock, when the hottest part of the day was over, a cavalcade, headed by Diana, filed out of the park gates and turned into the Boissise woods. The beautiful Lady Olifaunt, attired in a blue cloth habit with a white piqué bodice and a grey felt hat with a long veil, rode along followed by three or four horsemen, of whom Thauziat was one, as though choosing her path at random, though she was in reality very well acquainted with the neighbourhood, for she had taken the trouble to study a large map of the surrounding country which hung in Lereboulley's study. Her indifference, however, was so well simulated that even Clément was taken in by it and had not a suspicion of the plans which were slowly but surely being brought to perfection in the mind of the perverse but charming woman, unless it was that he was too deeply buried in his own thoughts to exercise his usual penetration. At any rate, for four days did Lady Olifaunt wander in the vicinity of Boissise, each day drawing a little nearer to it like a hawk describing contracting circles above its prey to fascinate and benumb it.

One afternoon about five o'clock, the little hamlet of Theil

was aroused from its drowsy quiet by the sound of the hoofs of four horses clattering along the street. The dogs which had been sleeping in the porches awoke and barked, the startled fowls which had been pecking in the dust fled helter-skelter to their yards, and a few women and children coming to the doors to see what was the matter saw it was Diana and her escort.

The horses were tired, their riders thirsty and the inn in the square with its gables and clematis-covered walls looked very inviting.

"Let us stop and see if we can get some cider here," said Diana to her attendants. "The horses can rest while we have some refreshment, and it will do us all good."

Thauziat sprang down, helped Diana to dismount and then the four sat down at a table under a shady arbour. They had not been there five minutes before a low carriage drawn by two ponies passed the inn and drew up at the church door.

"Why, that is one of Lereboulley's carriages," said Diana. "I recognise the livery. See who it is."

Thauziat went over to the groom, who had jumped down and was now standing at the ponies' heads.

"Are you not one of Monsieur Lereboulley's servants?" he asked.

"Yes sir," answered the man, touching his hat; "but I have now come from Boissise, where I am in attendance upon Mademoiselle Emilie."

"Ah, Mademoiselle Emilie is staying there?" questioned Lady Olifaunt with a slight frown.

"Yes, madame, with Madame Hérault. Mademoiselle is working at the paintings in the church."

“Let us go and see her, Thauziat,” said the beautiful Englishwoman. “Perhaps we shall see something interesting. Wait for us a moment, gentlemen.”

At first Clément followed Diana, then, when they had nearly reached the inner door of the church—

“Do not let us go in,” he said. “Why should we? We should only disturb Mademoiselle Lereboulley, who is, doubtless, in painting costume.”

“And besides, above all, we should find ourselves in Madame Hérault’s presence,” interrupted Lady Olifaunt, with a malicious laugh; “and you are evidently afraid of her.”

“Yes, I am afraid of her,” he replied, coldly. “And, since we are agreed upon that point, let us go back.”

“But I am not afraid either of the beautiful Hélène or the virtuous Emilie, so I am going in.”

Thauziat made a movement to restrain her, but he was well enough acquainted with Diana to know that, once she had formed a wish, she would do all in her power to satisfy it, and he accompanied her, feeling a little uneasy and fearing her malice more than her want of tact.

As the little door swung to again after them, it left them in comparative darkness. All the windows on the left side of the church had been covered over with large tarpaulins to avoid a wrong light; the sun entered only through the upper panes on the right, and the chapels, thus illumined, looked more bare and dilapidated than ever. Before the altar of the Virgin a small temporary scaffolding had been erected, and on the planks, about three feet from the ground, stood Emilie brush in hand, while at the other end

of the scaffolding was sitting Madame Hérault on a straw-bottomed chair, her son in her arms.

Mademoiselle Lereboulley was restoring a picture of the Nativity. The figure of the Virgin Mary was completely effaced, and, unable to obtain a model, Emilie had begged her friend to sacrifice two or three afternoons to her. Draped in white, her chestnut hair arranged in smooth bands upon her forehead, and with her eyes bent upon her child, who was as rosy and plump as one of Murillo's cherubs, Hélène looked divinely beautiful. A ray from the setting sun illumined her face, throwing golden reflections upon her hair and surrounding her head with a dazzling halo, and Diana and Clément paused for an instant in the shadow of the baptistery to gaze upon this unexpected picture which was one of such purity that Lady Olifaunt's heart swelled and a sigh rose to her lips as she looked. She glanced at Thauziat as he stood silent and thoughtful beside her, then—

“They are happy,” she whispered enviously.

“Yes,” returned Clément bitterly, “and they deserve to be. They are pure-minded beings, who are content with the simpler joys of life, and do not seek for consuming emotions and extravagant pleasures. See where these two women have passed their day—in a poor village church filled with silence and shadows; and they have been quite happy here, glad at being together and at devoting themselves to effecting some useful work! Would you care to sit for a picture of the Virgin on some rough boards for hours together, Diana? No, of course not. But it is not given to everyone to appreciate such pleasures. We, for instance, my dear, must have those that luxury bestows.”

And his lips became thinner, as if he were trying to smile.

Diana shook her head as she looked at him, then she said, gently—

“You wish to appear above such things in spite of yourself, my poor Clément, but I can see how you suffer. Do you still love her so much?”

He made no reply, but his face became as hard as stone.

“Let us go away,” said Lady Olifaunt, feeling really sorry for him. “You were right, we ought not to have come in here.”

She turned to go, but the voice of Emilie echoing through the church made her pause.

“Who is there?” asked Mademoiselle Lereboulley. “I can hear some one speaking. Is it you, your reverence?”

And they heard the shaking planks of the scaffolding creak beneath her weight. She was getting down.

“We are caught,” whispered Diana. “Come, we must put a good face on the matter.”

And moving towards the chapel, she stepped out of the shadow.

“Ah, it is Lady Olifaunt!” exclaimed Emilie. “What chance brings you into a church? Do you intend to give up Protestantism and become a Catholic? And surely it is not Monsieur de Thauziat who is with you?”

At this name Hélène started and turned pale, and glancing at Mademoiselle Lereboulley, as though to ask her counsel, she perceived that her friend was as agitated as herself.

“We had stopped here to rest for a little while, Emilie, dear, and - hearing you were working in the church,

Monsieur de Thauziat and I were tempted to come and admire your charming handiwork," answered Lady Olifaunt, easily. But," she added with a charming smile, turning to Madame Hérault, "the living picture we saw when we entered was so pretty that we have quite forgotten to look at the paintings."

"Ah, Hélène, there's a nice little compliment for you," cried Emilie, with a nervous laugh. "But how is it that it did not come from you, Clément? You are letting yourself be outdone, dear boy."

"Monsieur de Thauziat may have thought it though he did not choose to give utterance to his thoughts," returned Diana calmly, as she inspected Emilie's work through a long tortoise-shell handled eyeglass, which gave her an air of superlative impertinence.

Clément, after bowing to Mademoiselle Lereboulley, had gone over to Madame Hérault, who, in her emotion unconsciously held out her hand to him. It only rested with him to take it, but pretending not to see it he simply bowed.

"So now you intend to rival Raphaël, Emilie?" resumed Lady Olifaunt. "Your madonna is very nice, indeed, very nice, and the bambino, especially, is delicious. Almost as delicious as the original."

She stooped towards the child, who smiled at her blue eyes and golden hair, and held out his little arms to clasp her round the neck.

"You see, he is a boy, my dear," said Emilie, with bitter irony, "and even at his age he is not too young to want to kiss you."

"It is I who will kiss him, if his mother will allow me,"

replied Lady Olifaunt, without the least appearance of embarrassment.

And bending her head, she delicately touched the baby's satin cheek with her lips.

"One cannot tell yet whom he will be like," she went on. "Just look at him, Thauziat."

Clément did not move, but he made answer in his serious voice :

"I hope he will in everything resemble his mother," and with a bow to Hélène he moved a few steps away.

"Does he never wear anything round his neck, madame?" asked Diana. "I think that is a mistake. I have brought back some very pretty coral necklaces from Syria, pray allow me to send the darling one. You will see how admirably his white skin and the rosy pearls will show off one another."

She bowed to Hélène without giving the latter a chance to reply, then speaking to Emilie who had been watching her narrowly all the time—

"You have no message to give me for your father?"

"Yes, I have," answered Mademoiselle Lereboulley. "Tell him I hope it will not be long before I am able to return home."

Then with a friendly nod to Thauziat, she resumed her painting and paid no further attention to Diana.

"You were very hard on the poor woman," said Hélène after Lady Olifaunt had left the church. "I think she deserved a little more indulgence on your part."

"Because she flattered and caressed your child," broke in Emilie. "Do not let yourself be taken in by her deceitful ways. You do not know her, and let us hope you never will. Follow my advice, and always keep her away

from you and yours, for she may be a source of great danger to you."

Hélène thought of the first time she had met the beautiful Englishwoman at the gallery where Emilie had exhibited her portrait, and as she remembered the expression of unaccountable hatred in Diana's eyes, her heart grew heavy with presentiments of sorrow. Then her eyes fell on little Pierre who had peacefully fallen asleep upon her knees, and as she clasped him to her breast it seemed to her that with such a shield no blow could reach her.

Lady Olifaunt and Thauziat had crossed the church in silence, then as they opened the little swing door—

"Madame Hérault is not very talkative," said Diana; "she did not let us hear the sound of her voice once. But she is very pretty, and I can quite understand the fancy you have taken to her."

They went out, and, blinded by the sunlight after the dark church, stood for a moment unable to see anything distinctly. Still, it seemed as if there had been an addition to the group awaiting them in the harbour, and as they approached they found it was Louis Hérault who was talking to their friends.

He had walked through the park from Boissise, and had been much astonished to hear someone call him as he crossed the square. Then he recognised two of his club friends smoking and drinking cider.

"Why, is it you?" he exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"Waiting for Lady Olifaunt and Thauziat, who have gone into the church. When they come out we are going back to Lereboulley's."

Louis' face became very grave. In the church? It was there he was going himself to meet Emilie and H  l  ne. Then the two girls had seen Diana and Cl  ment, but had the meeting been pre-arranged on the latters' part, or had it happened by chance? On second thoughts, his first impression changed for the better. After all, would they not all be compelled to meet at some time or another? Would not Thauziat's coolness towards himself eventually disappear, and would they not again be friends as in the past? Then surely it was better for the reconciliation to be effected as soon as possible.

Yet he remembered H  l  ne's hostile sentiments, and the opposition she had shown whenever he had manifested the least desire to make it up with Thauziat. How would she behave towards Diana and Cl  ment? He had no fear as regarded Diana, for H  l  ne had never even suspected the intrigue he had commenced with the beautiful English-woman. But Cl  ment? He did not feel the least jealous at the thought that the man who had so passionately loved his wife was then beside her. He was perfectly easy on that score, for he had received too many proofs of H  l  ne's strong sense to feel a moment's anxiety, unfortunately for his young wife, for had Louis been less sure of her, he would have been on his guard against a possible danger, and would have kept Thauziat and Lady Olifaunt as far apart from her as possible. But, under the circumstances, he never dreamt of doing such a thing, and where a vain and frivolous woman would have been protected, there was Madame H  rault left defenceless, owing to her moral superiority.

When he saw Diana and Cl  ment approaching the harbour, Louis advanced to meet them.

“Well, we shall have seen the whole family!” cried Lady Olifaunt. “After the mother and the child, here is the father! How do you do, Monsieur Hérault? Marriage seems to agree with you very well, for you are looking as fresh as a rose. Come, Thauziat, don’t be sulky, but give your hand to your friend, who has been holding out his to you for the last minute.”

Clément had indeed been confounded by this hand so frankly and cordially stretched out to him, and which his honour forbade him to take. Until then he had contrived to keep away from Louis, and to hide from him his real sentiments. “I could not see you his without hating him,” he had said to Hélène. But did he hate him? No! Thauziat’s haughty mind could not stoop to hating any one so weak, so he contented himself with exhibiting towards his former friend an iciness which defied all attempts to thaw it. He would not have done Hérault any harm—he felt too much his superior for that; he merely wished not to meet him, to hold no communication with him. And suddenly he found himself in his presence, with no possible means of avoiding him. Between Louis and himself there was only the space of this outstretched hand, at which he looked without being able to bring himself to take it.

“If I give him my hand,” he thought, “I shall be deceiving him, for I cannot be his friend as before, and, therefore, I shall be a hypocrite and an impostor. But if I refuse I shall be cutting off every means of communication with Hélène, and I can live no longer without seeing or speaking to her. On the one side is deceit, on the other despair.”

For a moment there was a violent struggle between his

love and his pride. Then he made an angry movement and his face blanched. His love had won.

In the meantime Louis was holding out his hand to Clément, but his eyes were fixed on Diana who had never seemed so beautiful to him as at this moment. Her slight and supple figure, shown off to perfection by her riding-habit, was bent a little backwards in an attitude of voluptuousness, while under the grey hat, tilted daringly on one side of her golden head, her eyes looked the colour of corn-flowers. Her half-opened lips permitted her little almond-shaped teeth to be seen, and her smile seemed at once tender and contemptuous. The kiss given and received the night of the ball returned to Louis' memory, and as he thought of it a thrill passed through him, and his heart beat wildly. He forgot Thauziat, he forgot Hélène, he could see nothing but this perverse and adorable woman, whose love must cause so cruel, yet so delicious, a transport.

Thauziat's hand touching his own aroused him from his passionate contemplation, and he pressed and held it closely.

"You will not refuse it me again?" he asked. "Tell me that all which has kept us apart is forgotten?"

Clément bent his head, and answered in a low voice—

"Yes, all."

"Oh, I know you too well," resumed Louis. "I was sure your anger could not last long. You have seen Hélène in the church, and spoken to her? I will make peace between you, and you will be great friends. You see, old boy, she is a matron now, and we are both thoroughly domesticated; our life would be far too simple and mono-

tonous for you. Besides, you are not made for wedded bliss. You thought you were, but you may esteem yourself very lucky for not having been permitted to gratify your fancy. Eagles like you are not meant to have their wings clipped ; for a poor gander like your humble servant it's different."

"There, what do you think of that ?" cried Diana, gaily.

As Louis spoke, Thauziat's lips had curled sarcastically. Hérault had wished to dispel the last clouds between them, and he had only succeeded in exciting a contemptuous pity. Then, this was how this man so beloved appreciated his happiness ! This was how he spoke of this woman, as the possessor of whom his eyes ought to have flashed with pride whenever he mentioned her name. A good mother, and thoroughly domesticated ! As in a burlesque, the triumphal car was changing to a child's go-cart.

"Well, my dear Monsieur Hérault, now you have drawn us such a charming picture of your wedded happiness, pray accept our heartiest congratulations," said Lady Olifaunt, gravely. "You certainly have no cause to regret your former life."

"Who knows ?" answered Louis, gazing ardently at the beautiful Englishwoman.

"Oh, no, you have not, unless you are most abominably ungrateful. Your love is secure, your life regular, you have nothing at all to do with the tumult of the passions, to reverse what you so wittily said to Thauziat just now. Keep your feet warm and your head cool, and you will live to a great age."

"You are laughing at me, madame, but I make no protest ; you have a right to do so."

"It is very kind of you to concede that right to me."

"You are capable of taking it if I did not do so."

"Oh, I am always ready to take anything that pleases me."

As she uttered these words she looked at Louis through her eyeglasses, with her eyes half closed and her mouth drawn into a coquettish pout.

"Do not flatter yourself that that applies to you," she added, saucily. "You know I don't count you any longer, now you are tied to someone else's apron strings."

"I am not tied so tightly as you think," he returned eagerly. "Have I your permission to come and see you?"

"No, no, dear boy. Go on with your billing and cooing in your own dovecot. Thauziat, you are a witness that I refuse to receive him."

"I will come in spite of your refusal," he retorted, laughing. "Should I be doing anything so very wicked?"

"Don't have the faintest hope that you will have the chance of doing anything wicked!"

And as she spoke, Diana passed before him, displaying beneath her raised skirt a dainty little varnished boot, the heel of which struck the paving-stones with a cavalier tap.

"Come, gentlemen, we have stayed chattering long enough. We have a good three miles to ride before we shall be home."

She went over to her horse, and without asking her permission Louis took her in his arms and lifted her straight into her saddle. She merely looked down at him with her provoking smile, and said—

"Why, you are stronger than I should have thought."

She gathered up the reins, touched her horse with the

whip, and, with a wave of the hand to Louis, cantered off amidst a cloud of dust.

“*Au revoir*, Thauziat. *Adieu*, gentlemen,” cried Hérault, left alone in the middle of the square. His eyes seemed dazzled, his blood felt boiling in his veins, and with a sigh he turned and entered the church.

On the way home, Diana and Clément rode side by side. For a long time there was silence between them, until at last Lady Olifaunt said to her companion—

“Well, now you are reconciled to Louis in appearance at any rate. It will be far better so, for you were becoming quite gloomy.”

Clément turned a face as sombre as the night towards her.

“Twice have I lied, Diana—in word and in deed. I have given Louis my hand, and I have told him all is forgotten. It is the first time I have ever committed a base action, and it is causing me acute suffering.”

“Oh, you exaggerate! All’s fair in love! Why look at the example your Pylades is setting you? If I had chosen, I could have brought him back to dinner with us. He betrayed his wife, in thought, a dozen times during the few minutes we passed with him. And are you to have any scruples? Don’t be so like a knight-errant, but act up to your generation. There is no room for morality nowadays, and only fools are virtuous.”

“I had but one religion, and that was my honour,” said Thauziat, in a choking voice. “Now I have been false to it.”

“Your religion is the love you bear a woman. Is not love the supreme motive of human action? Every truly

great deed which is done, even though it should be great in infamy, is inspired by love. Place yourself above the common level, Clément. Can the general principles which govern the world influence a certain class of beings? Will you allow yourself to be strangled by moral cords which only exist by the will of mankind? What is the good of being superior to other men if you bend beneath the same yoke? Throw off your fetters, and take your own pleasure as your only law. That is what I have done for a long time past, and I have never regretted and do not now regret doing so. In short, there is but one thing of importance—you love."

"Madly!" answered Thauziat.

"Then remember what I told you more than a year ago—that you and Louis Hérault would be rivals. You see, I had a sort of insight into the future. You answered me with a laugh: 'When that happens, I will give him up to you, and that shall be my revenge.' And now the day has come, Clément. But I will show some consideration for your conscience since it is so very sensitive. I will not ask you to give Louis Hérault to me, I shall be able to reconquer him unaided. And when you see the beautiful madonna betrayed and outraged by the man to whom she has sacrificed you, your virtue will probably wing its way to heaven for good and all, and you will cease to be an angel to find yourself a man."

"Diana!" cried Clément violently, "I forbid you—"

"Nonsense," retorted the beautiful Englishwoman, stopping the words on his lips, "nothing is ever forbidden to a woman."

And as Thauziat again attempted to speak and to implore her—

“Be quiet,” she said. “The others are coming up and may hear what we are saying.”

Then she added in a whisper,

“And when the woman you love is in your arms remember that it was Diana who placed her there.”

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH the autumn hard work began again. Lereboulley, Thauziat and Hérault, more closely united than ever, were making every preparation for the floating of the cable company, and frequent meetings were held at Lereboulley's offices, Rue Le Peletier. There were several important matters to arrange before they could really embark upon the enterprise. The English company, startled by this attempt at competition and strong in the possession of a cable, were prepared to begin a war to the death. Therefore, it was only reasonable to expect a lowering of the rates of transmission, and consequently it would be necessary to lay the cable and to work it afterwards with such economy that they would not only be able to fight but to conquer. This at least was what Louis explained to his wife with so many details and so much prolixity that Hélène looked upon the scheme as one of tremendous importance and risk.

Still the persistence with which he made it the theme of conversation on any and every opportunity, and the way in which he always accounted for the evenings he spent out (which were now very numerous) by meetings he was forced to attend, began to make his young wife uneasy, and one day that Emilie was dining at the Faubourg Poissonnière, Hélène suddenly asked her—

“Will your father go to America to see about the cable as he did to Corinth about the cutting of the canal?”

“ Papa went to Corinth to be in Lady Olifaunt’s society,” answered Emilie, laughing. “ Without the yacht and the charming passenger aboard it he would have sent a representative. Besides, I never hear him speak of America or the cable either.”

“ But he and Louis and Thauziat pass nearly all their evenings together studying plans.”

Emilie glanced round the table, saw that H  l  ne was anxious and Louis embarrassed, and guessing that her friend was trying to lead her upon dangerous ground, she cut short all further inquiries by saying—

“ Very possibly they do. My father never tells me anything about his business matters.”

“ If he told you about the discussions we have, you would not be very interested,” said Louis, becoming himself again. “ They are taken up by technical details and endless columns of figures. Just imagine—”

“ Oh, have mercy on us, Louis dear, and reserve your arguments for when we are alone,” cried H  l  ne, with assumed gaiety.

Then turning a searching gaze upon her husband—

“ For myself, I am always ready to listen to you ; it teaches me.”

The conversation was changed, but after dinner, under pretence of smoking a cigarette, Emilie took Louis into his study, and said abruptly—

“ So you have concealments from your wife, have you ? What is the meaning of all these tales about consultations with Thauziat and my father of an evening ? As if my father attended to anything but his own amusement after seven o’clock ! Perhaps you do the same ? ”

“You are dreaming! What on earth can you be thinking of?”

“Of what is very probable with such a nature as yours to deal with. You have been lucky enough to obtain an angelic wife, but the chances are that her goodness wearies you, and that you run after vice to indulge your taste for contrast. You are too secure in your love, and it leaves you plenty of leisure time to employ in doing wrong. What you wanted was a wife to rule you with a rod of iron, and who, at the slightest suspicion of infidelity on your part, would have been ready to pay you back in your own coin. Then you would have been so busy defending yourself that you would have had no time to attack. The fact of the matter is, you are too happy, and now you are seeking the means of damping your joy a little.”

“My dear Emilie, that is all very keen and ingenious on your part, and I am exceedingly flattered by the high opinion you have formed of my character. But you are at fault. I am not the monster you think, and if I do go out without my wife a little oftener than I should, I only indulge in very innocent amusements.”

“Then there is some truth in my conjectures?” exclaimed Mademoiselle Lereboulley.

“In your conjectures, no; but as far as facts go, yes. It is not very lively for me the evenings that I pass at home with Hélène and my grandmother. As soon as dinner is over, my wife shuts herself up in the child’s room, and there is nothing for me to do but smoke a cigar and doze in an arm-chair. At nine o’clock my wife reappears, and, though I allow that her society is very charming, yet after a time it becomes monotonous, and so what am I to

do? I feel I want some amusement, that I need stirring up to prevent me slipping into a drowsy, domestic life, and so I go out."

"Where do you go?"

"To the club, generally."

"Do you play?"

"A little. Oh, very little."

"And of course you lose?"

"Sometimes yes and sometimes no. I have about as much bad luck as good. Nothing serious, simply a steady-going family man's game."

"You are quite sure that it is to the club you go? Don't tell me lies, because I shall soon find them out."

"Where do you think I go?"

"I don't think at all, I only fear. If you go to the club why don't you tell your wife so? There is nothing criminal in it, and it would be much better than telling her untruths. You will let it out yourself one of these days, or someone else will unconsciously betray you, and then the confidence *Hélène* ought to have in you will be shaken, and she will be grieved. It is very foolish to act as you are doing."

"If I told her I went to the club, it would only worry her. She does not understand as you do what is the life men lead at Paris. She would imagine that I had again plunged into the hell whence she naïvely flatters herself she has rescued me. In short I wish to avoid discussions, and I prefer to spare her any anxiety."

"Well, then, don't be content with make-believes, but spare it her in reality. But we have been talking for over a quarter of an hour, and if we stay here any longer our

absence may give rise to suspicions, so let us go back to the drawing-room."

This conversation gave Emilie much food for thought. She was too shrewd to accept Louis' explanations for more than they were worth, and she determined to find out exactly what her former play-fellow was doing. To this end she skilfully questioned her acquaintances, and in less than a week she knew that the majority of the evenings Louis was away from home were passed at the house of Lady Olifaunt.

Neither was Hélène deceived by her husband's tales, but, unlike Emilie, she did not wish to ascertain the truth. To her, doubt seemed preferable to certainty, for she felt that once the truth was revealed to her, her happiness would be gone for ever, and rather than attempt to know, she closed both ears and eyes, so afraid of what she might learn was this woman hitherto so courageous.

She consoled herself for her anxieties and troubles with her child, and it was when she was with him that she showed herself in all the height of her beauty and fascination, for over her noble face would steal an expression of loving gentleness which made her eyes shine, and her lips smile with the ineffable charm of proud motherhood. As she held her boy in her arms as in a soft, warm cradle, softly singing lullabies to soothe him to sleep, or dancing him on her knees while shouts of laughter rippled from his little mouth like scattered pearls, she offered a spectacle endued with exquisite poetry, and it was then that Louis should have joined her to place himself in unison with her heart and mind. It would have been enough for him to see her so young, so spirited and so devoted, for him to have been

filled with a new affection formed of tenderness and respect. He would have understood that H  l  ne was not only a beautiful woman, but also a faultless mother, and that, if the bonds of their love had been loosened for an instant, chains yet stronger, because welded by gratitude, had been forged to bind him to this perfect creature.

But, instead of following her to their child's room, he stayed in the smoking-room with a cigar between his lips, or in the drawing-room reading a newspaper. In vain did old Madame H  rault say to him—

“Do come and see little Pierre undressed. You will be astonished at his beauty and his pretty little ways. He's fit to be sent to a show.”

Louis only smiled at what he called a grandmother's exaggerations, and answered in hackneyed phrases about the necessity of hiding all the little details connected with the rearing of a child from its father's eyes, and quoted the English system, with the nursery away from the other rooms, to prevent the children's noise reaching the parents' ears.

“But, my dear boy, this child never does make a noise ; he is always laughing and chirping to himself,” argued the old grandmother. “He's a perfect marvel ! And dressed like a prince ! You should see the lace he has.”

“Oh, yes, he's very nice, but all children are the same. I sha'n't feel much interest in him till he begins to talk.”

Madame H  rault said no more, and only sighed as she thought of the pleasure of which her grandson was depriving himself. Then as she could not induce Louis to go to the child's room, she herself spent enough time there for them both, standing entranced beside the cradle of little

Pierre, whose chest heaved regularly as he slept with his fair hair peeping out from under the little cap trimmed with Mechlin lace, and his tiny, pink fists clenched as if he were clinging with might and main to his delicious slumber.

Hélène, in the meantime, busied herself with knitting little white socks as she sat by the window letting her thoughts wander where they would, and often they bore her far away from this happy room where dwelt the consoling angel. She asked herself if, in her maternal selfishness, she had not done wrong to sacrifice her husband to her child, for in her generous way she blamed only herself and almost excused Louis for drifting away from her. She saw that the bondage which was so sweet to her could not be a delight to him, and that the existence which contented her must seem very monotonous to this young rake, though still, she had to confess to herself that with a little self-denial he could have put up with it. Did she not try to make it as attractive for him as possible, and would not her efforts have been successful if his nature had been less superficial and frivolous? He never saw her otherwise than smiling and good-tempered, and she even affected a coquetry she had never shown before, and devoted great attention to her dress. But it was merely trouble thrown away. Her husband gave her a careless kiss, paid her a slight compliment without seeming to think of what he was saying, and remained just as far away from her as ever. She did not think he was tired of her; she only told herself, "I must be patient. He will come back to me of his own accord when baby is weaned," and, with her way of always seeing the best side of things, she looked forward to a second honeymoon.

But she was very wrong in her expectations, as she found too soon. As Louis went out nearly every evening, it was one of Hélène's delights to go to her husband's room and sit there alone for an hour or two. It seemed to her that thus she drew near to him, and that she left a trace of herself in the silent, empty room—a subtle essence of sweet affection which in the end would reach Louis' heart. She arranged all the little ornaments on the mantelpiece, opened wardrobes and cupboards to place sachets among the linen and clothes, and rendered all the little affectionate cares which she would have liked to lavish on her loved one to the things he used. Then, when she had finished her work, she seated herself in Louis' arm-chair, took up from the table the open book or paper, and tried to concentrate her thoughts on the same subject as he had done, and so put herself in intellectual communication with him. As she sat dreaming, she forgot the flight of time, and one evening she was only aroused about midnight by the sound of her husband coming in, humming an air from some comic opera. She had barely time to catch up her light and run away, for she did not wish to be caught in his room, apparently forcing her way into it.

Louis never for a moment suspected his wife's frequent presence in his chamber. He had never noticed the faint, pure perfume which lingered after she had withdrawn, silently and lightly as a good fairy watching in the shadows. He always found everything in perfect order, but he never attempted to discover whose hand it was that worked so unobtrusively for his comfort. Perhaps he had never even noticed that there was an improvement in the way his house was kept since his marriage.

One evening a new piece was coming out at the Palais Royal, and Louis hurried away immediately after dinner. Hélène, after putting her little boy to bed and playing a game of cards with Madame Hérault, feeling a little low-spirited, went up to the anteroom before her husband's bedroom and fastened herself in. There, in the semi-darkness, she gave way to the vague but painful impressions with which her mind was filled. There was no reason why she should feel more worried than usual, and yet, as she lay back in an arm-chair with her hands lying listlessly in her lap, she could not keep from crying, and the tears flowed down her cheeks in a sparkling stream. It seemed as if she had a presentiment of approaching misfortune, or as if she had suddenly become aware of some harm which had been wrought her.

In about half-an-hour she called her common-sense to her aid, and, unable to find the shadow of an excuse for her strange grief, she was obliged to put it down to nervousness. Then, angry at this unusual predominance of her physical over her mental powers, she scolded herself and forced herself to become calmer, and wishing to find some active occupation which would employ hands and thoughts at the same time, she went into her husband's bedroom.

She smiled as she looked round at the disorder in which he had left it. He generally left keys, money, letters lying about anywhere—on the mantelpiece, in the vases, or in his pockets, and to-night the servants, who were making up for the fatigue of the day by sitting over their supper in the kitchen, had not yet come to make all tidy for the night. Hélène picked up the clothes left on the floor, and noticing some papers thrown pell-mell on a little

table, she gathered them together and was about to place them in a drawer, when a thick card, engraved in the corner with a Latin motto in steel blue Gothic characters attracted her attention. "*Amo et odi*" said the device, and on the card was traced one line in stiff, angular handwriting: "To-morrow at three o'clock, Rue de Moscou." That was all, no address and no signature.

The other papers fell on the table again, and in her hand Hélène held only the small, thick card, from which she could not take her eyes. The motto, which she hardly understood, with its metallic letters of changing blue, seemed to her to twist and writhe like the coils of a snake, and she felt a dull pain at her heart as from the poison of these venomous characters. Involuntarily she raised the card to her face, and from the faint perfume which it exhaled, and which seemed to penetrate to her very brain, Hélène felt sure the message was from a rival. At the thought, the blood rushed to her head, crimsoning her cheeks, burning her brain; her feet became icy cold, and everything swam around her. A deathly faintness had come over her, and, afraid of falling senseless in this room, she soaked her handkerchief in a bowl of water which was standing on a tray, and pressed it to her forehead.

Gradually she recovered herself, and became able to examine this scrap of paper, which contained in the enigma of the words it bore the fate of her life. "To-morrow, at three o'clock." But why should it be a criminal appointment? What was there to prove that the woman—for there could be no doubt that the message had come from a woman—who had written it was her husband's mistress? Alas! the subtle, voluptuous perfume answered that question

but too plainly. It revealed the woman who enveloped men with the seductions of her flesh, and who wished, even when she was absent from them, to surround them with the spell of her charms, of which this perfume was one of the most potent and most dangerous weapons. Yes, it was from a mistress !

But when had this card been sent ? Had he received it that morning or that evening ? When he came home, was he returning from his appointment ; had he just left this woman's arms with her kisses still warm upon his cheeks ? Or was it on the morrow they were to meet at three o'clock at the Rue de Moscou ? Rue de Moscou ! Where ? In what house ? He evidently knew the trysting-place well, for no number was mentioned. And he must see this woman in other places besides, since a special meeting-place was mentioned.

All these ideas passed through Hélène's mind in a perfectly logical sequence. She could see a long way into the shadows which had been so carefully cast around her, and she wished to penetrate them still further. She hurried to a bookcase and looked for a Latin dictionary. The word "*odi*" was the word she could not understand, and she had a vague idea that, once she knew its meaning, all would be made clear to her. She found the book she was seeking, and, by the light of a candle, commenced hurriedly turning over the leaves, murmuring all the time, as if to conjure up the mysterious word—

"*Odi—odi—odi—here it is ! Odi—I hate.*"

Again she looked at the card and read : "*Amo et odi,*" then translated : "I love and I hate."

She put the dictionary back in its place, closed the book-

case and returned to her husband's bedroom. In a second the image of the golden-haired woman she had met for the first time with Emilie at the picture-gallery, and who had glanced at her with eyes so full of hate, arose before her. She did not hesitate, she did not doubt, the woman who had sent that card could be none other than Diana Olifaunt. The love and hatred which she so boldly avowed were centred on Louis and Hélène. It was Louis she loved, Hélène she hated.

The young wife, now cool and clear-headed, felt weighed down by a burden of sorrow, of which her melancholy, apparently so causeless, had been but the magnetic forerunner. She was filled with a measureless indignation against this woman for thus robbing her of her happiness. All that had happened within the last eighteen months returned to her mind, and she saw cause and effect with perfect lucidity and judgment. She recognised the value of the advice she had received and had not followed; she remembered that Emilie had prophesied before her marriage what would surely come to pass. She could hear her saying now, "Louis is a child; marry Thauziat."

Thauziat! His handsome face appeared before her eyes like a gloomy, sorrowful phantom haunting her memory. He also suffered, he too was unhappy. How he had gazed at little Pierre the day he had entered the church! And in what a tone had he said, "I hope he will resemble his mother in every way." Would she have been happier with him? Yes, she confessed to herself now that she would. His every thought, his every deed, would have had her as their starting-point. He would have adored her as his only divinity, he would have consumed his very soul

at her feet as the only incense pure enough to be offered to her. The tears sprang to her eyes, but she passionately dashed them away, for to her it seemed as if her involuntary return to the past were treachery to her husband, and even if he were guilty, she had no right to let her thoughts wander as he had allowed his love to stray.

Suddenly she realised the misfortune which had befallen her, and it was as if all the infamy, the shame, and perfidy she could possibly imagine had been rolled into one enormous burden, and then permitted to fall upon her, to crush her to the earth. She uttered a moan, and then remembering where she was, and fearing to be surprised in this despair, she walked firmly to her own rooms.

She passed through her bedroom, which was lighted by a night lamp, and went into little Pierre's room. She dismissed the woman who was with the child, and then, seating herself beside the cradle, she leant her head against the iron rod from which hung the curtains beneath whose shadow the child was calmly sleeping, and there allowed her bursting heart to overflow. Her suffering was intense, and yet not one thought of anger passed through her mind. She folded her hands to pray, and her simple, touching petition went up to Heaven. "My Father," she said, "you see my sorrow, and I ask from you but one consolation in this world—leave me my little one. As long as I have his smile to greet me, as long as his little arms are clasped around my neck, I shall have no right to murmur, and I will bear my grief with resignation. He will be my consolation, and perhaps, through him, shall I be enabled to reclaim his father."

Drop by drop her tears flowed on to the pillow. One of

these hot pearls fell on the child's forehead. He moved, turned his head, and, opening his eyes for an instant, recognised his mother. His little mouth smiled, his blue eyes sparkled, then again he fell asleep, and was lost in his dreams. As he moved, H       saw on his white neck the coral necklace Lady Olifaunt had sent him the day after their meeting in the church. She felt that the trinket must bear with it a curse, as did everything that came from that woman, and, unfastening the clasp, she rose, and crossing over to the fireplace, where a bright fire was still burning, she threw it into the flames. Then she resumed her seat beside the cradle and continued her watch.

The next day at lunch Louis was very affectionate and gay, for his heart was overflowing with a delight he could not repress. He did not notice H      's pallor, for he was one of those good-tempered egotists who think that everyone else is happy when they are pleased themselves. So he joked with his grandmother, discussed his financial schemes with his wife, in short, was thoroughly good-natured, and rose from the table with the conviction that he had shown every kindness to his family.

And yet H      , unable to control herself sufficiently to have hidden the true state of her feelings from a less careless observer than Louis, had not uttered a word, and had hardly tasted anything. She was consumed with a burning fever, and every moment she raised her glass to her lips and eagerly drank some water, in the hope of quenching the fire which was inwardly consuming her. She listened to her husband's jests with a bitter smile, perfectly aware that it was the delight at having seen his mistress the evening before, or the joyful anticipation of meeting her

that very day, that made the happiness bubble up from his heart to his lips. His hypocrisy maddened her; she would have liked violence, brutality even, better than these lies. If he had suddenly risen to his feet, and looking her full in the face, had cried: "I have had enough of all this deceit! I love another woman, and I am going to meet her!" she would have answered, "I am glad to hear you say so. It is cruel, it is infamous, but it is not cowardly. You break my heart, but you do not betray my trust, and at any rate you do not soil my lips with kisses like those you have just bestowed upon another!"

But Louis was not so heroic. He went on talking, evidently thinking of other things the while; then, when he left the table, he went to see his son—a thing he was not in the habit of doing every day. *Hélène* followed him to their child's room, eager to see how nearly deceit could counterfeit truth. Louis played with his little boy, smiled at and kissed him, and danced him in his arms with all the frank good temper possible. His ease and tranquillity were such that a doubt came into his young wife's mind, and she asked herself if she had not been dreaming for the last few hours. Wishing to assure herself of the truth of her discovery, she asked—

"What are you going to do to-day?"

He looked up uneasily, as if he had noticed a threat in the way the words were pronounced.

"Why do you ask?" he returned.

"Because I have arranged to meet *Emilie* to go and choose the hangings for my boudoir, and I should have liked to have had your opinion when I bought them."

"What time do you meet her?"

“ At half-past two.”

He looked vexed.

“ I am very sorry, but I am afraid I cannot come. I should have been delighted to accompany you, we so seldom go out together ; but business before everything. They expect me at Saint Denis.”

“ Can you not send word to say you cannot go ? There is plenty of time—it is only one o'clock—and I should be so glad if you would come, Louis.”

Hélène uttered the last words almost in the tone of a prayer. This time her husband did not look at her, and his face became grave and troubled. For a moment he seemed to hesitate, then he answered,

“ Forgive me, but it would be impossible. My business this afternoon is of the gravest importance.”

“ Very well,” said Hélène, her heart palpitating wildly.

He went over to her as if he wished to ask her pardon, and drawing her to him, he kissed her affectionately on the forehead. She quickly disengaged herself from his embrace ; the tears rose to her eyes, but she restrained them by a strong effort of will, and forcing herself to show a perfectly calm countenance—

“ Then good-bye until this evening,” she said. And she went into her own room.

Henceforth she could have no doubt, but she meant to make her certainty as complete as possible, and to see her rival. She hastily dressed herself in her out-door clothes, put on a veil thick enough to conceal her features, and ordering the carriage, drove to the Lereboulleys’.

She had determined to reveal all to Emilie. When she had told Louis that she had an appointment with her friend,

she had already made up her mind to ask the latter to advise her and assist her to protect herself. She had absolute confidence in Mademoiselle Lereboulley, for she knew the strength and breadth of her mind. No one else would she have allowed to see the wound her love had received ; but had not Emilie been acquainted with her hesitations before her marriage ? Besides, had anything been hidden from her of the life the young couple had led for the last year ? Perhaps, with her keenness and penetration, Mademoiselle Lereboulley had already guessed the answer to the enigma for which Hélène was seeking. If only she would tell it her and spare her all humiliating inquiries and painful searches ! Yes, she must question her again and again, until she had told her all she knew. And, in her haste to know her misfortune in all its details, the young wife longed for space to be annihilated that she might the sooner satisfy her cruel curiosity.

When at last the carriage stopped, Hélène sprang out on to the pavement, dismissed the coachman, and eagerly asked if Mademoiselle Lereboulley was at home. The doorkeeper replied in the affirmative, and sounded a gong, which brought a footman out to the steps.

“ Mademoiselle is in the studio,” he said ; and leading the way, he took Madame Hérault up to the second storey of the house, opened a door, and withdrew.

Seated at an easel, Emilie was giving the last touches to a charming study of some roses, orchids, hyacinths and ferns, which were lying on a table before her. At the sound of the door opening she turned her head, and recognising Hélène uttered a cry of delight ; then she rose, and with her palette still on the thumb of her left hand, went to

meet her visitor, and kissing her, made her sit down beside the easel.

"But what is the matter?" she asked, as Madame Hérault raised her veil and displayed her face blanched by worry; "you look quite upset."

Hélène bent her head; her emotion choked her, and she could not speak. She had not thought that the confession of her grief and her husband's misconduct would have been so painful for her to make. But Emilie knew too much already not to guess what her friend hesitated to tell her, and she determined to question her.

"Is Louis the cause of your trouble?"

"Yes," replied Hélène.

And as soon as she had answered, her words flowed freely, and she was able to tell all. In vain did Mademoiselle Lereboulley attempt to reason with her and to shake her convictions, by saying that there might only be a chance coincidence between the accusing note and the refusal of her husband to give up to Hélène the hour fixed for the meeting. After all the card was not dated; perhaps it referred to the day before, and who was to prove that Louis had kept the appointment? And, even if it were for that very day, who was to know that Louis was going to keep it?"

"I am!" said Madame Hérault.

"And how?"

"I intend to watch him."

"My dear, you will not do as you say!"

"You may be sure I will do it, unless you tell me the name of the woman with whom Louis is so abominably deceiving me."

“How am I to know who she is?”

“By her shameless device, which is worthy of the lowest woman in Paris,” cried *Hélène*.

And drawing out her card-case, she took from it a small piece of paper on which she had written the Latin words and held it out to *Emilie*.

The latter became very grave—she recognised the motto as *Lady Olifaunt’s*. For a long time she gazed at the paper as if she were examining every letter on it, but all the while she was thinking—“Then the bitter moment for poor *Hélène* has come at last. She already knows all the pangs of jealousy, and she has yet to know all the humiliations of neglect. And it is that abominable *Diana* who is beginning to instil the poison drop by drop.”

She shuddered as she thought of the abyss into which her friend was in danger of falling. *Diana* was capable of everything, even of the worst of crimes, to gain her own ends, and there was everything to fear if a struggle commenced between the two women, for *Hélène* was one to fight for her own. *Emilie* came to the conclusion that it would be best to mislead as long as possible the wife’s suspicions, and so prevent her discovering the mistress, and to do that it would be needful not to leave her to herself, but to accompany her and try to defeat her plans.

“I do not know this motto,” she said, looking up, “but it might just as well belong to a man as to a woman.”

“The writing, the perfume, all is a woman’s,” interrupted *Hélène*, irritated by *Mademoiselle Lereboulley’s* resistance.

“Very well, then, it is from a woman. She makes an appointment to meet your husband at the *Rue de Moscou*

to-day—I will grant that also. But what do you intend to do? Wait in the Rue de Moscou? But for what?”

“I shall wait until my husband and this woman come out.”

“And supposing the woman lives in the house, and does not come out?”

“No, if she lived there she would not have put ‘Rue de Moscou.’ It is only a meeting-place.”

Emilie could not help smiling.

“That’s pretty logically reasoned,” she said. “Grief does not muddle your ideas.”

“It heightens all my senses,” exclaimed H  l  ne, excitedly, “it increases my strength tenfold. Oh, don’t think that I am a woman whose only resource in trouble is her tears, and who is utterly defenceless. I shall fight for myself, for my child, and for my husband’s honour. I shall not seek protection from the law; I do not want either a separation or a divorce. I want my husband who belongs to me, whom I love in spite of his faults, and whom I mean to bring back to my arms. I suffer intensely to see him drifting away from me, but I should suffer infinitely more if I lost him for ever. That is why I wish to know all—not to obtain legal proofs, not to discover pretexts for reproach and quarrels, but to find out the woman against whom I shall have to struggle, and to learn how I may vanquish her!”

Mademoiselle Lereboulley gazed at her friend with pitying tenderness. H  l  ne’s eyes were full of determination, there was energy in every line of her clever face, and her hands trembled as though impatient for the fight. She so thoroughly personified courage and perseverance that a

little hope returned to Emilie's heart. Young, beautiful, strong and earnest, why should not Hélène triumph over the hateful Diana? But, alas! does not vice always come off victorious in this world? Did she not know it, she who had seen since her childhood so many women hanging round her father, women who lived on their beauty, who were received everywhere, thanks to their elegance and extravagance, and who forced their way into a society which ought to have refused them admittance, but which, on the contrary, fêted and caressed them. A husband, to hide their infamy under his name, a little propriety, for the sake of appearances, and with these concessions to respectability they could live the life of courtesans, could ensnare husbands, sons, and brothers, could brave with their impudent smile the forsaken wives, the anxious sisters, the sorrowing mothers, and sow wherever they went anguish, mourning and ruin.

Could not one call to mind numbers of these adventures who reigned in drawing-rooms, theatres, and watering-places alike, always wearing the handsomest diamonds, always seated in the best boxes, and driving in the best appointed carriages? People whispered the names of their protectors to each other, but they were the friends of duchesses, and, by means of the benevolent societies they enriched by their gifts, and the concerts in aid of charities where they sang, they made their way into the highest circles of society, always with a train of lovers in their wake ready to spend money to give them pleasure. And, of all these women of besmirched reputation, was not Diana the most formidable, the most rapacious and the most insolent? And Hélène proposed to enter the lists

with her with no other weapons but her pride, her courage, and her intelligence, and forsaken by him who ought to have been her protector but who would deliver her up to her enemy and himself reveal the place where she could be mortally wounded. Yet was not her cause just and good? And, since she resisted instead of meekly submitting, did she not deserve every assistance her friend could render her?

Before all, Emilie resolved to avoid the shock of a meeting between Louis, Diana, and H  l  ne. If the appointment was really for that same day, at any cost these three adversaries must be prevented from encountering each other suddenly in public, or on a general staircase where they would be exposed to the curiosity of passers-by or the indiscretion of servants, and so she decided to accompany Madame H  rault so as to hinder, by every means in her power, a possible scandal.

H  l  ne was excitedly pacing up and down the studio. Mademoiselle Lereboulley rose, and said with a smile,

“You are quite determined to go to the Rue de Moscou? Very well then. But I shall not let you go alone; I shall come with you myself. I am sure beforehand that you will not see anyone appear at the trysting-place, but in any case I shall be there to prevent you committing any folly.”

For all answer, H  l  ne gratefully kissed her friend, and, the maid having brought Emilie her cloak and hat, they went downstairs.

“You have sent your carriage away? A very wise precaution! We will take a cab; it is only half-past one and we have plenty of time.”

Soon they were being borne towards the Pont de l'Europe at the moderate trot of a broken-down old horse. Hélène, who had formerly lived in the Boulevard des Batignolles with her mother, was perfectly familiar with the quarter, and, to increase the chances of the success of her ambush, she had decided to station the cab, from which she was going to watch, midway between the two ends of the street; thus she could easily see anyone coming either from the Boulevard or from the Place, and once she had discovered which house was in question she could take up her post opposite it and wait for Louis and his companion to come out. Emilie had no objection to make to this plan of campaign. She allowed Hélène to stop the cab at the spot indicated, and waited in anxious suspense.

Neither could be recognised under their thick veils as they sat, Madame Hérault with her eyes fixed on the turning into the Boulevard, whence she had a presentiment Louis would arrive, Mademoiselle Lereboulley watching the Place through the little window at the back of the cab. They did not speak, but their laboured breathing betrayed their anxiety. From time to time, Hélène drew out her watch and looked at the time. It seemed to her as though the hours would never pass. Just as the hands marked a quarter to three, Emilie started—her sharp eyes had just caught sight of Diana, closely veiled and in a plain grey dress, but easily distinguished by her walk, approaching along the pathway at the edge of which their cab was drawn up. She was coming to her appointment in the calm way of a woman perfectly accustomed to such things, and about twenty yards from the cab she turned into a gateway.

Emilie did not move a muscle. She had promised to

tell Hélène directly she noticed anything or anyone suspicious, but she deliberately failed to keep her word.

"If Louis comes the same way," she thought, "all is saved for to-day. This evening I shall be able to warn him before his wife can question him, and I will then try to persuade him to alter his conduct."

An exclamation from Hélène interrupted this train of thought, and, turning round, Emilie saw her friend leaning as far back in the cab as she could, pointing towards something in front. Mademoiselle Lereboulley looked in the direction of the outstretched finger and saw Louis quietly approaching, with a smile on his face and his hands in his overcoat-pockets. He came up to the cab, cast an indifferent glance at the two women sitting within in the semi-darkness, and passed on without suspecting for a moment their identity.

When he had passed, Hélène, who was trembling from head to foot, leant out of the window, watched him enter the house where Diana had already arrived, and then opened the door to get out of the cab.

"What are you going to do?" asked Emilie, taking hold of her arm.

"I want to make inquiries, to question, to know."

"To whom will you address yourself? To the servants? To the door-keeper? People who may wonder at your agitation, be frightened at your appearance and warn your husband. No, that must not be. Leave me to act. I am calm, and I shall find out more than you would and with far less trouble. Wait for me here, I shall not be long."

"Very well, I will wait for you."

Emilie got out of the cab, and in her turn entered the house. At the farther end of the court-yard a stable-boy

was washing a victoria, while the door-keeper was sitting on a bucket turned upside down, with his broom between his legs, talking to him. Mademoiselle Lereboulley went to his lodge, where she found a little thin, crafty-looking woman—a person exactly suited to a house of the kind. When she heard the door open, the woman came forward.

“Madame,” said Emilie, “I have to ask a little service of you.”

And as she spoke she opened a purse formed of golden links, took from it two louis, and laid them on the table. The woman moved her hands as though to protest, but her eyes brightened at the sight of the coins.

“If it is nothing that can get me into trouble,” she answered, “and I can be of any use to you—”

“You can,” returned Emilie. “And make yourself easy, there is no question of vitriol or revolvers. A gentleman has just entered this house where he has some rooms in which he receives a lady or some ladies, I don’t exactly know which and I don’t care. All you have to do is to send into him at once a little note I am going to write. You need not be afraid, he will thank you for it.”

“Will there be any answer?” asked the woman.

“No, madame, I shall give you the note, then I shall go.”

She took out one of her cards and rapidly wrote on it in pencil the following words :

“Your wife is in a cab at the door waiting to see you come out. Don’t let Diana leave here for another hour, but you come out immediately, walk away towards the Place de l’Europe, and come to my house before you go home.—EMILIE.”

“Have you an envelope?” she asked.

The woman looked in a dirty blotting-book and discovered an envelope amongst some printed receipts and old papers. Emilie addressed it to "Monsieur Louis," put the card inside it, and giving it to the woman—

"Here it is, madame. I am very much obliged to you."

'It shall be sent in to him at once,' said the woman, won over by Emilie's calmness.

"Good afternoon, madame."

And she went out to the cab again.

"Well?" asked Hélène.

"He is not known in the house, it is the first time he has ever been there. Only bachelors and married couples live there, as the landlord won't have single women in his house, so the door-keeper, who seems a very respectable man, told me. Therefore we must ask ourselves if you have not given way to fears for which there was not the slightest cause."

Hélène looked at her friend and saw that she seemed perfectly reassured. She sighed. What would she not have given to find her fears were only in vain! But the letter, which bore no signature or address, the motto and the perfume, Louis arriving at the appointed hour? Still it was true she had not seen the woman come, so what could the appointment mean? Why had it been arranged?

"Let us stay a little longer," she said.

"As long as you like," answered Emilie, sure now of the ending the adventure would have.

They both remained silent, watching the gateway. In about a quarter of an hour Louis came out quite calmly and strolled away in the direction of the Pont de l'Europe.

"There's a past-master in hypocrisy!" thought Emilie.

“He looks as innocent as a little saint ! Poor H  l  ne will have all her work to do to checkmate him.”

Then aloud—

“Well, dear, our man has departed. It is clear now he did not come to keep a love appointment.”

“Unless you sent him a warning,” interrupted H  l  ne, with a suspicious glance.

“And how could I have done so ? If he had rooms in this house he would have been sure to take them under an assumed name. How could I, in so short a time, find out that name and send him a message ? Besides, what reason should I have for deceiving you ?”

“You might have done so out of friendship,” answered H  l  ne, dubiously shaking her head. “But it would be a poor way of proving your affection, for nothing could be more painful to me than running the risk of living in entire confidence with a man who was false to me. He might laugh at me, and, ridicule being thus added to the other horrors of the situation, I think I should hardly survive the humiliation.”

“Make yourself easy, my dear. When your husband comes in this evening, question him, and he will perhaps give you the explanation of the mystery himself. And now I am going to take you home.”

She went to the Faubourg Poissonni  re with H  l  ne and remained with her until half-past five. At seven o’clock Louis came in to dinner, as usual, and went straight into the drawing-room, without even going first to his own room. He kissed his wife and grandmother, took his seat and gaily asked—

“Well, what have you been doing with yourselves to-day ?”

"I," said old Madame Hérault, "went to the *Bon Marché*, to buy some wool to knit vests for my poor people; then I took a turn in the Champs Elysées, and here I am."

"And you?" said Hélène to her husband. "What have you been doing?"

"Well, I have lent ten thousand francs that I never expect to see back again. But it was to a man who was a friend of mine in the old bachelor days. He wrote to me twice, and I took no notice, but at last I gave in, and I took him the money to-day."

"Where to?"

"Rue de Moscou," replied Louis indifferently. "Then I went to Saint Denis."

"Did you have the carriage?"

"No, I took a *fiacre* in the Rue d'Amsterdam to the Gare du Nord. And at last here I am, as grandmother says."

Hélène was struck by the extraordinary precision of her husband's answers; to her they seemed too exact to be true, and she felt there was the ingenuity of guilt betrayed in them. She was sure a trick had been played her and that Louis had received his instructions from Emilie, but into her generous mind there entered no thought of anger. She understood the motives which had guided her friend and forgave her, but she determined to redouble her vigilance in order to arrive at a certainty.

Louis had, in fact, followed Mademoiselle Lereboulley's instructions to the letter. He had gone straight to her house after leaving the Rue de Moscou, and had awaited her for two hours, which to him had seemed centuries. He was impatient to know what his wife had discovered,

angry at having been found out, and a little uneasy about the lecture he knew he should receive from Emilie.

At last Mademoiselle Lereboulley dashed in like a whirlwind, did not offer him her hand, but briefly said, as she passed through the drawing-room—

“Come up to my studio. There we shall be able to talk more freely.”

He followed her, and, when they were in the large room and the door closed, she took off her hat and cloak, threw them on a couch, and taking up her stand before her friend—

“Well, yours is pretty conduct !” she exclaimed.

“There, Emilie,” he replied, “scold me as much as you like, but first tell me what has happened.”

“It is so very difficult to guess, is it not ? You leave your letters lying about, your wife finds one, reads it, and, without me, she would have caught you with Diana.”

“I don’t know how to thank you—”

“There is no need for you to do so. I have not acted as I have done for your sake, for, to tell the truth, I am simply sick of you. I can’t understand a man being such a fool. You have a charming wife who adores you, an angel of a child, a great deal more happiness than you deserve, and you don’t hesitate to compromise it all for a worthless woman, who laughs at you behind your back.”

“Emilie !” exclaimed Louis, angrily.

“Why, have you still any illusions with regard to her morality ?”

“Do not speak to me of her. Say all you like about me, you will never say anything bad enough, but respect the woman I love.”

"That would be very difficult to do, there is so very little respectable about her."

Louis took up his hat and rushed furiously towards the door. Emilie seized him by the arm—

"Come, stay here, and don't be a fool. I will not say anything more about Lady Olifaunt, if you are so sensitive on the subject. But I have not done with you. I have managed to make your wife believe you are not known in the house where you have your miniature Tour de Nesle. But she will question you, so be ready to tell her a lie which has some appearance of truth to explain your visit there. For once, there will be some good in your lying."

"Emilie!" was all Louis could say, as he sat the picture of embarrassment and vexation.

"Only, I warn you that Hélène has not meekly accepted the idea of your falseness to her, and you will get into trouble if you continue your pranks. She will defend herself with every means in her power, and you know you had better take care. People are often carried away in a moment of anger, and she is very pretty. What if she gave you tit for tat, eh?"

"She is incapable of such a thing, she is too highly principled a woman."

"And so you are quite easy on the point?" returned Emilie, with scathing irony. "What pitiful wretches you and men like you are! And how much more your wives would be considered by you if they were only less faithful to their duty! 'She is highly principled, and so I can torture her with impunity. She will suffer, she will weep, but she will not avenge herself: she is virtuous!' And

so you, strong in this security, go on your way without a second thought, while your poor wife stays at home to nourish and bring up her child. The revelation of her misfortune may so act upon her mind as to kill her, and, through her, the child, but what does that matter? You must have your amusement! What cowardly behaviour yours is!"

"You exaggerate, and are a little too theatrical," answered Louis, with a constrained smile. "I will not try to excuse myself, but if my wife had been a little more my wife and rather less the mother of her son, perhaps all this would never have happened."

"That's enough!" cried Emilie, white with rage. "It only needed that to make you complete. You are turning *Hélène's* very goodness into a crime, you are reproaching her for what ought to make her sacred in your eyes. Don't say another word, but go! I used to look upon you as my friend, I do so no longer. But, before you go, listen to one last word of advice—if you have no consideration for your wife, if you disregard Sir James Olifaunt, and you are wrong in doing so, don't set *Monsieur Lereboulley* at naught. He clings very tightly to his *Diana*, he would not sacrifice her even for me, and he will not let you deprive him of her without a struggle, so beware!"

And as Louis contemptuously shrugged his shoulders—

"Oh, he will not seek a quarrel with you. He will not try to attack you, sword or pistol in hand—he has better weapons than those. He will simply ruin you financially. Forewarned is forearmed. Now, you can go."

She turned her back on him, but he went up to her more agitated than he wished to show, and holding out his hand to her—

"I thank you again for what you have done for H  l  ne and for me. But do not let me leave you thus. My affection for you is of such long standing ; you are the only person I really like besides my grandmother, my wife, and my child. You have hurt me very much, but I bear you no grudge. I am guilty, I know, but what good will it do you to overwhelm me with reproaches ? Pity me, it will be better, and perhaps more efficacious."

She looked at him, and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"What poison does this creature instil into you all," she exclaimed, stamping her foot, "to thus infatuate you one after another ? And you, you are nothing but a child, utterly helpless ! Come, try at least to be a little more sensible !"

"I promise you I will."

"The promise of an opium-eater," she answered, with a sad smile. "There, go along ! They will be anxious about you if you are late to-day."

He seized her almost violently by the shoulders and kissed her, then, all his melancholy apparently fled, said—

"You are a very good-hearted girl."

"And you, a scoundrel !"

"Adieu," and he left the studio.

For some time after he had gone Emilie sat thinking. The advice she had given to Louis she had given seriously, for she knew her father's anger would be terrible when he found out how he was being deceived. Concerned as he was in all the business connected with H  rault's firm and as Louis was in all the senator's transactions, nothing could be easier than for the latter to ruin the young man. With the important financial means at his command, Lereboulley

could wreck or float a speculation as he chose, and under the influence of his resentment, he would at once conceive the idea of wounding his rival through his fortune, well aware that that would be the surest way of wresting Diana from him. Emilie knew Lereboulley's unconquerable passion for his mistress; Lady Olifaunt had made herself simply indispensable to him.

Then, besides this danger to which Louis was exposed, there was another to which Mademoiselle Lereboulley had hardly alluded, viz., the risk he ran from Thauziat's love. As he saw the husband gradually living more and more apart from his wife, Clément, unless he possessed a superhuman generosity, would attempt to profit by the separation, and, though there could be no question of Hélène's chastity, Thauziat was so extremely fascinating. Thus Emilie saw her friends' safety threatened on every side, simply through Louis' fault, and she determined to do all in her power to aid them to steer their bark amid the rocks without disaster.

If Madame Hérault had continued to stay at home, as she had done since the beginning of winter, the chances of misfortune would have been considerably diminished. But the young wife changed her tactics, and declared that henceforth she would go into society with her husband. Thus, she was inevitably bound to meet Lady Olifaunt, and the result must be an implacable fight between the two women. It was impossible that those interested in the combat, amongst whom Lereboulley was in the foremost rank, should not hear the whizzing of the arrows in their flight from one side to the other, and, unless they were voluntarily deaf and blind, they must understand what was going on, and therefore all was to be feared.

Louis did not receive the announcement of his wife's resolution very enthusiastically. He had become too well accustomed to his return to bachelor habits not to wish to prolong the duration of them, but the objections he raised were at once firmly put aside by H  l  ne.

"My little Pierre can do without me in the evening now," she said; "and I don't see why I should shut myself up in the house. I think I deserve some pleasure, and I mean to amuse myself a little; it will be a change for me."

And she began to frequent parties, balls, and theatres, and to receive at her own home; in fact, she resumed the life she had led immediately after her marriage. One could feel she was making every effort to attract, and she succeeded admirably. Her somewhat stern beauty had become softer and was now irresistible, and she had a circle of flattering, attentive admirers to whom she showed that she was even richer in wit and intellectual grace than in physical charm.

Thauziat, with his calm pride, did not join the ranks of courtiers and flatterers, but there was a certain something in the way he saluted H  l  ne, or spoke to her, or walked with her which assured her supremacy in society. Yet there was nothing either in Cl  ment's words or in his attitude towards her which could by any possibility compromise her in the smallest degree, for he testified towards her a respect he had never shown for any other woman. There could be no doubt that he was in love with her, but he himself so well affected not to cherish the least hope that Madame H  rault's virtue was regarded as impregnable.

And she herself passed through the crowd, listening to

gallant propositions, replying with a smile, easy, free, apparently perfectly indifferent but in reality continually on the watch. Never did she lose sight of her husband, and not one of his movements escaped her. And this chase in Parisian drawing-rooms with a betraying husband as the quarry, possessed a bitter but irresistible attraction for a keen observer as was Emilie. Strangely enough, since H  l  ne had again entered society, Diana and she were never to be met in the same house. It seemed almost as if the beautiful Englishwoman were always told beforehand by a secret friend of all Madame H  rault's engagements for the evening.

Louis, always affable and good-tempered, took his wife wherever she chose to go, and behaved so like a model husband that H  l  ne, in spite of her tenacious temperament, began to weary and to doubt her own convictions, when an unexpected incident suddenly gave her the clue she was so eagerly seeking.

CHAPTER IX.

EVERY year, Lereboulley, although he hated music, gave two or three concerts in the splendid drawing-rooms of his mansion to please his daughter, who, a very clever musician and a fanatic admirer of Wagner, had done much to acclimatise the German master's dramatic compositions in Parisian society. Having made her friends listen to as much of the beautiful but severe music as French frivolity could be reasonably expected to accept, she now confined herself to patronising young musicians who could not force their way into public notice although their talent was undoubted. The execution of these unpublished works was confided to a specially-chosen orchestra, while the best singers of the day undertook the interpretation of the vocal scores, and these unique gatherings always attracted an enormous crowd.

The first concert that year was to be devoted to the hearing of fragments from *Manfred*, an opera by André Wordler, the composer of a charming *berceuse* which Lady Olifaunt had frequently sung during the winter with great success. Aware of the interest Diana took in Wordler, Madame Hérault felt sure that this time she would be fortunate enough to meet her, but she was very nearly again disappointed.

Little Pierre, who was generally nothing but merriment and laughter, on the morning of the concert woke up dull and peevish. His mother felt very uneasy about him, and

sent for the doctor, who said there was not the slightest cause for fear, that the child was a little feverish owing to his teeth, which were just beginning to show through the pink gums, and that was all. But H  l  ne, in spite of his assurances, countermanded her order for the hairdresser, and seemed decided not to go to the Lereboulleys'. About eight o'clock, however, the child fell into a calm sleep, and the young wife, altering her decision and becoming as confident as she had before been frightened, ordered her toilette to be put ready, telling her husband her hair would be very well dressed by her maid. Louis timidly attempted to oppose this second decision, but he was soon disheartened by H  l  ne's quiet obstinacy, and resigned himself with a sigh.

It was eleven o'clock when they reached the Lereboulley mansion. The first part of the concert had commenced, and Talazac and Mademoiselle Isaac were singing an exquisite *nocturne*. Emilie, who was sitting in the small drawing-room, rose with a look of surprise when she saw Monsieur and Madame H  rault, and advanced to meet them.

"My little boy is better, and, as I felt quite reassured, I insisted on coming," said H  l  ne.

With a glance Emilie pointed out to Louis Lady Olifaunt sitting in the first row of seats. At the same moment H  l  ne perceived the Englishwoman and turned pale as she saw how radiantly beautiful she was. Her skin looked dazzlingly white against the sulphur-coloured tulle dress she was wearing, the train of which was trimmed with the yellow-hued roses called *R  ve d'or*, and the bodice cut very low to display her superb figure and alabaster back ;

diamonds sparkled in her fair hair, and her hand was slowly swaying to and fro a feather fan mounted in tortoise-shell.

Attracted as by a magnetic influence, Diana's eyes turned towards the Héraults, and meeting Hélène's, the two women exchanged a long look. Diana smiled and waved a graceful greeting with her fan, Madame Hérault gravely bowed her head. At last she had met the woman she suspected. At last she was going to see her and Louis together, to watch them both and seek to discover their secret from the intonations of their voices and the expression of their faces.

But in this she was reckoning without Emilie, who skilfully contrived to draw her towards a group of ladies, in the midst of which she intended to enclose her as in a citadel.

Lereboulley, having shaken hands with Hérault, came up to speak to Hélène, and Louis seized the opportunity to hide himself amongst the crowd of men who, bored and solemn as mutes, stopped up every doorway, stifling every now and then a yawn, and standing as far out of earshot of the music as possible.

He had met Thauziat and Sir James, but had left them, after a minute's conversation, to reach by means of skilful tacking and manœuvring, a place whence he could admire Diana without being seen by Hélène, and taste the secret pleasure of thinking he was the lover of this woman whose beauty excited such universal admiration. He heard every one around him murmuring her praises, and waves of fire seemed to rush from his heart to his brain.

Diana herself was listening with an air of innocent delight to the singing, which she rapturously applauded, and, apparently indifferent to all that was not the work of

her favourite Wordler, looked absorbed in a state of delightful beatitude.

Yet she was very well aware of what was going on around her, and had managed to turn her head to look at Louis. She carelessly placed her fan to her lips to send him a kiss, and then, having paid this tribute to her love, again gave herself up to the pleasure of listening to the music. She felt that Hélène was watching her. She seemed to feel the weight of the young wife's gaze upon her, and she resolved to find her husband during the first interval, and, under pretence of a headache, beat a prudent retreat before the enemy, for she was most anxious to avoid any scandal.

So as the last notes of a *finale* died away amidst general applause, she rose from her seat and beckoned to Thauziat.

"I do not feel very well," she said, taking his arm. "Will you take me into the little drawing-room reserved for the *artistes*, as I should like to compliment Wordler before I go?"

"Is Madame Hérault's presence the source of annoyance?" asked Thauziat, sarcastically.

"Perhaps," replied Diana, with a meaning look. "Comparison with her is very difficult to bear. She is really splendid, and her husband is very stupid to deceive her. But husbands always are stupid!"

"With the exception of Sir James."

"Oh, he is someone aside."

"You might almost say with two sides."

"You are very witty this evening, Thauziat. If you said such sharp things to Madame Hérault you would increase your chances with her."

"There, don't be angry, Diana, I was only joking."

"I am not angry. You know that I permit everything to you."

They had reached the dining-room, changed for the time being into a refreshment-room, which was filled with couples, some of whom were striving to get near the high table covered with a magnificent service in chased silver, while others were talking as they ate and drank standing up, waited on by the impassive servants.

"Do try to get me a bunch of grapes and a glass of iced champagne," said Diana to her companion.

Clément soon returned with a bunch of transparent, golden grapes upon a plate of silver-gilt.

"These are some of the lovely white grapes we used to admire in the vinery at Evreux," said Lady Olifaunt. "They are really exquisite. Last year Lereboulley sent me a vine on which his gardener had grafted a rose branch, so that it bore grapes and roses at the same time. Lereboulley certainly knows how to do things," she added, looking round to see if she could catch sight of Louis, but the young man was nowhere to be seen.

She took the glass of champagne Thauziat was holding for her—

"I drink to the success of your love, Clément," she said.

She drank the wine in little sips, with her pretty neck, which swelled like a dove's, thrown slightly back. Then, again taking Thauziat's arm, she moved towards a little drawing-room which opened into the senator's study. The room was nearly empty, and they were about to pass through it, when Madame Hérault appeared at the opposite door on Lereboulley's arm, Emilie following behind.

Diana pressed Thauziat's arm and glanced around her, but it was too late to retreat, and the encounter, which so many friends had tried to prevent, was bound to take place.

The beautiful Englishwoman put on her most smiling look, and, with her azure eyes fixed on Hélène's face, moved calmly forward as if she were the most saintly of women. And yet, bold as she was, she felt an unaccustomed emotion, for she was afraid as she stood face to face with Madame Hérault; she realised that her antagonist was her superior, and she tried to hide the heaving of her bosom by gracefully fanning herself.

Emilie had tried to draw Hélène and her father towards the concert-room, but it was no longer Lereboulley who was guiding Madame Hérault's steps, it was she who was forcing him to go whither she wished. She had seen Diana, and she advanced upon her as upon an enemy. Lady Olifaunt paused, she did not wish it to appear as though she fled, and, making the first bow, boldly commenced the attack :

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting you, madame, since I saw you sitting for a madonna in the little church near Evreux. How is your dear little boy?"

Hélène listened to the sweet voice, to which the very slightest foreign accent lent an additional charm, and could distinguish no false ring to mar the music of its harmony. Then she studied Diana's bearing, but could find nothing in it to betray the smallest embarrassment. Could she have been mistaken, and must she seek elsewhere her detested and unknown rival?

"You are a fortunate mother, madame," continued Lady Olifaunt, "and other women may well envy you."

She might have gone on talking like that for ever, Hélène was no longer listening to her. Her attention had just been drawn to the yellow feather fan Diana was waving to and fro before her, and on one of the tortoise-shell sticks of which she saw the sparkle of some diamond letters which formed two or three words she was unable to make out. It was a motto, no doubt, but which one? An inward voice told her it was the same as she had read on the square, white card. Then a mist swam before her eyes, there was a confused ringing in her ears, and the blood rushed to her head. Making a violent effort to keep up, she seized Emilie's arm and convulsively clasped it, and then turning very pale, addressed Lady Olifaunt :

"That is a lovely fan of yours, madame? Will you allow me to see it closer?"

Diana held out to her the fan which was fastened to her waistband by a straw-coloured silken cord. Hélène took it in her hands, and, with passionate eagerness, read on it the words : "*I love and I hate.*" A deadly chill passed over her as she recognised again in English the device she had seen in Latin. Then it was this clever, wicked, golden-haired woman who was her rival! She was suddenly filled with a mad hatred for her, she longed to tear out those limpid eyes, to dig her nails into those voluptuous lips on which Louis' had been laid, to throw down and trample upon this dimpled form which had robbed her of the caresses of the man she loved. She was still mechanically holding the fan in her clenched hands, and again she read, this time aloud, in a dull and choking voice,

"*I love and I hate.*"

"That means in French, '*J'aime et je hais,*'" said Diana.

"But like all mottoes it expresses more than the truth. I am neither so very affectionate nor so very malicious."

"*Amo et odi*," went on Hélène. "Does not that mean the same?"

"Exactly," answered Lereboulley.

Diana stepped back with a presentiment of danger, but Madame Hérault followed her up.

"Women who carry on intrigues ought never to write, so they say," she said with withering contempt. "Yet it was on paper bearing a device so characteristic as this one that you fixed an appointment with my husband."

Lady Olifaunt turned ghastly pale, and snatching her fan from Hélène's hands, she uttered a low cry and went over to Lereboulley who had been looking on in speechless amazement.

"Madame," exclaimed this latter, placing himself between the two women, "are you sufficiently guarded in your words?"

"I am more guarded in my words than has been this creature in her actions! A moment ago she had the audacity to speak to me of my child, knowing she was the mistress of its father!"

"Will you allow me to be thus insulted beneath your roof?" exclaimed the beautiful Englishwoman to Lereboulley.

And as the latter stood petrified with astonishment,

"Arouse yourself and defend me," she cried.

She was furious with rage as she stood with clenched hands, returned in an instant to the barmaid that Thauziat had raised from the gutter. Hélène, cold and haughty, gazed at her in silence. All her anger had vanished, and

she now felt nothing but an immense grief. It seemed to her as if her joy, her pride, her modesty had all been swallowed up in the chasm which had suddenly opened within her heart. She felt a deep and bitter disgust for this place and for this woman, she longed for silence and solitude, she wished to go home and be beside her child, and turning to Thauziat who had silently assisted at the scene—

“May I ask you to take me to my husband?” she said.

She took his arm, bowed to Lereboulley, and went out with Emilie, without bestowing even a parting glance upon her rival.

Hélène had hardly left the room before Lereboulley recovered himself.

“Diana, if what Madame Hérault has said is true, woe to you and to Louis also!” he exclaimed.

“She is mad! Are you going to put any faith in the utterances of a jealous woman? Do you think I understand a word of all she has been saying? Her husband tried to make love to me before he was married—you know very well how persistent he was—and perhaps she has found a note from me when she was turning out some of his drawers. But ought she to come to the conclusion that I am leading that fool Hérault astray? Because I am attractive and admired, because their husbands run after me, all these women envy and detest me! But how can I help it? I do nothing to gain attention. It is most horrid and abominable! And the most cruel blow of all was to find you abandoned me to the auger of that insolent woman; all you did was to mumble a few useless words. But there, you cannot love me, for when a man loves a

woman he respects her himself and makes others do the same ! ”

“ Diana ! ”

She burst into tears, and Lereboulley, at his wits' end, and fearing each moment to see someone come in, attempted to soothe her.

“ There, there, Diana, you don't mean what you say. I, not love you ! Come, pull yourself together, someone might come, and if you were found alone with me, and in tears, what would be thought ? Let me beg of you to come into my study. There, there will be no fear of being disturbed.”

She consented to follow him, then dropped on a couch with the grace of a young nymph who knows a satyr is observing her. The senator paced up and down, regardless of the concert which was going on, indifferent to all the people with which his drawing-rooms were filled, absorbed by the fear of a misfortune.

“ Oh, if I believed that that Louis—”

“ You are not yet convinced of my innocence ! Well, then, what should you do if I suddenly said to you : ‘ I hate telling lies ! You want to know if Louis Hérault is my lover ? Yes, then, he is ! ’ ”

“ Diana, do not jest upon such a matter. It would be a terrible affair if you did deceive me. I would recoil before nothing to avenge myself.”

“ Would you do me any harm ? ”

“ Perhaps.”

“ I should like to see you ! ” exclaimed Lady Olifaunt, darting so ardent a glance at Lereboulley that he forgot his rage and suspicions, and could find nothing in his heart

but an intense desire, and on his lips nothing but enamoured words.

"Diana, how beautiful you are! A man might well commit a crime to call you his!"

"And what would he do to keep me?"

"Only command. All that you wish shall be accomplished."

"Very well, we will see," she answered, coldly. "In the meantime, give me your arm, our absence may be remarked upon." She smiled, as she nestled against her elderly adorer. "It would not need more to lead to the belief that there is something between us."

He threw his arms around her, and, bending his smooth, bronzed face over Diana's white shoulders, caressed them with his thick lips. She gave him a little tap on the cheek, and freeing herself—

"Come, Lereboulley, change the current of your thoughts."

He sighed, and a moment after had returned to the drawing-room with Lady Olifaunt on his arm.

Every trace of emotion was already effaced from Diana's face, and she had regained all her laughing airs and modest graces as quickly as a mask, as easily resumed as laid aside.

But if Lady Olifaunt had supported the trying episode unmoved, it was not so with Hélène. When she had left the Lereboulleys' with her husband, the latter being in perfect ignorance of the scene which had just taken place, Madame Hérault felt the terrible reaction of all her emotion. As she lay back in the corner of the brougham, her head covered by a lace scarf, she trembled violently. Her teeth

were clenched, there seemed a burning fire within her breast, the jolting of the carriage caused an intensely painful throbbing in her head, and every now and then a bright light flashed before her eyes. The quarter of an hour's drive home seemed interminable to her.

Louis, unable to understand his wife's silence, looked anxiously towards her from time to time, and at last asked—

“Do you not feel well? Is there anything the matter with you?”

With an effort she opened her mouth, and replied, in stifled tones—

“No, nothing.”

The carriage drew up at the steps of the mansion, and, getting out, she staggered a few steps forward, then was obliged to lean for support against the brass rod of the awning. Louis, startled by her condition, lifted her in his arms and carried her straight in and upstairs, until they reached the first landing, when she managed to walk to her room.

When she was seated by the fire without her wraps, Louis saw that she was pale and shivering, that her eyes were heavy and her hands listless.

“Good heavens, what is the matter?” he cried, anxiously. “Hélène, tell me, are you in pain?”

“Yes—a little—”

“But when and how did this begin? Do you feel cold?”

“Yes, very cold—all round my heart.”

He stretched out his hand to ring, but she stopped him by a gesture.

“No, do not rouse the servants. Call no one but your grandmother.”

He hurried away, and within a few minutes old Madame Hérault was beside her. Louis quietly left the room, and then the old lady helped Héléne to undress and go to bed. When she had drawn the covering well over her, she saw how she shivered, although her face was crimson, and she prepared a steaming beverage, going from the bed to the dressing-room with slow and tiny steps, but seeing to everything. She went into the child's room, leant over his cradle to watch his quiet sleep, then returned to Héléne to say :

"Do not worry about little Pierre, he is fast asleep. If he should wake, I will give him some warm milk and he will be all right."

"Thank you so much for your kindness," whispered the young mother, with a wan, sad smile.

At this moment Louis re-entered the room to say he would sit up with his wife, but his grandmother seemed to guess Héléne's wishes, and protested that her grandson's presence would not be of the slightest use, and that she herself could do all that was needful.

"You go to bed, my dear," she said, "and I will stay here. Old people don't require so much sleep as young ones."

Then, as Louis persisted, she added :

"Your wife would prefer it so."

He went to the bedside, and touched Héléne's arm, which was burning hot, then, with a heavy heart, he kissed her gently on the forehead. There was a question on his lips he dared not utter, but he guessed that Diana was in some way the cause of Héléne's illness. The obstinate silence with which all his inquiries had been met, the desire for

his absence and for the presence of old Madame Hérault alone, all told that some grave incident had happened which would materially alter the situation.

The next morning, as Hélène felt no better, Louis sent for Rameau de Ferrières. His wife's sufferings were still further increased by a mental anxiety—she feared she would no longer be able to nourish her child. Was she to be deprived of this supreme consolation in her distress? Would she be compelled to abandon her rosy, golden-haired baby to the care of a stranger? Again and again did these torturing thoughts haunt her brain during the hours of restless, feverish sleeplessness. She had lost the father, was she also going to lose the child? About three o'clock in the morning she had been slightly delirious, and had said aloud—

“If they give my little Pierre to that wicked woman he will die.”

Old Madame Hérault had quietly risen from her arm-chair by the fire, where she was busying her fingers with her eternal knitting, had leant over Hélène, and, laying her hand on the burning forehead, had replied in soothing tones :

“Be easy, my child. If you are ill, I will look after the child myself. He shall not be confided to a stranger's care.”

Hélène sighed, and her eyes shone in the shadow of the curtains. Then she sighed, muttered some incoherent words, and fell asleep.

When she again awoke it was broad daylight, and the clever physician, who had just arrived, was talking to Louis in the next room. He came in, shaking back his hair, which was like a lion's mane, and approaching the bed—

"Well, my dear madame, are you so foolish as to stand in need of me? Let us see what is the matter."

He felt her pulse, looked at her eyes, took the temperature of her body with a thermometer, then turning to Louis—

"It is nothing serious, but the temperature is a great deal too high."

But when he had drawn Hérault into a corner he said gravely—

"She has had the narrowest escape of brain fever. There is bilateral contraction of the organ, and she will need the greatest care."

Then seeing that Héléne was anxiously watching him, he returned to her.

"Now, I should like to see my patient's little one."

Little Pierre was brought in laughing and looking the picture of health. The doctor took him in his arms, felt his firm limbs, kissed him, then said, in reply to Héléne's anxious questioning glance—

"Well, we must wean the little rogue. It is rather soon, perhaps, but he is quite strong enough to bear the change, and I would rather put him upon cow's milk than change his nurse. Are you satisfied with that arrangement, madame?"

Héléne feebly moved her head, and two tears dropped on the cambric pillow-case.

"We must not fatigue her," said Rameau to Louis. "If you will take me to your study, I will write out a prescription."

They went out together, and as soon as the door had closed behind them, old Madame Hérault, without asking anybody's aid or advice, wheeled Pierre's cradle into his mother's bedroom, and put it near the window so that

Hélène could see it from her bed. The young wife exchanged a look with the old grandmother in which her whole soul shone forth. Then she would have spoken, but the other put her finger to her lips, resumed her seat, and went on with her quiet work.

Louis did not leave the house, and from time to time came to ask news of the invalid. He had brought with him Emilie, who had called early in the morning and who was received by Hélène with delight, and under the care of her two nurses—her grandmother and her friend—Madame Hérault seemed to revive. But, towards evening, the feverish symptoms returned, and all seemed to threaten that the night would be a bad one. Rameau prescribed some soothing drugs, and gave the patient a draught to make her sleep, but he felt no anxiety about the case, for he knew that Hélène's vigorous constitution was capable of resisting a great deal of suffering.

Emilie determined to stay at the Héraults' to relieve old Madame Hérault in her watch by Hélène's bedside, and she dined alone with Louis, who had been spending his time wandering through the empty rooms, tortured by all kinds of anxious thoughts. He had not wished to go to Lady Olifaunt's house, and he had received no letter from her, and between his wife, who was lying ill, and his mistress, who gave no sign of her existence, he was in a sombre fury with himself and everyone else as well. He told himself he was a scoundrel for thinking of Diana almost in Hélène's presence, and yet he could not tear the image of the beautiful Englishwoman from his heart, and constantly she was before his eyes, calling him with her sweet voice, inviting him with her radiant beauty. Emilie's arrival was

an immense relief to him—first, because she could tell him what had really passed between the two women, secondly, because he could talk to her of Diana, and that was a happiness to him, even if he only opened his lips to curse the golden-haired beauty, and to swear he would never see her again.

He was, in the little boudoir which preceded Hélène's bed-room in the evening, talking to Emilie, giving vent to bitter words, and cursing the day he had yielded to the charms of the lovely but dangerous enchantress.

"For she is really dangerous," he said, "with her audacity and her treachery. I know her well; she is wickedness itself."

"I believe that is why you men like her so much," answered Emilie. "She is a change after your sisters and your wives, who are simple, innocent, and good. But simplicity, innocence, and virtue—a housewife's qualities—are not amusing, and you run after women who are not restrained by any regard for their reputation."

"She is perfectly heartless," continued Louis furiously; "she is cold and cruel. She knows the anxiety I have been in ever since this morning, and that, after yesterday evening's scandal, I would give worlds to know what she is doing, and what she thinks of the situation; but what does she care? I daresay she has never even bestowed one thought upon me, although I have sacrificed the best and most charming of wives to her. No, she is laughing and enjoying herself! She is the most atrociously ungrateful woman on the face of the earth! I don't expect she will write me one line."

"And she is wise in not doing so, for that is how she

keeps you all. If she did not treat you like dogs she could do nothing with you, so she goes on the system of a wild-beast tamer—she rules you with a bar of red-hot iron, and reduces you to obedience by enforcing abstinence. You accuse her of being cruel and ungrateful; and are you yourself neither cruel nor ungrateful? The torture Lady Olifaunt is inflicting upon you is but a slight revenge for Hélène's suffering. Diana is a manifestation of the justice of Providence—for you, she stands in the place of expiation. And we are speaking of her as she is now, young and pretty. Unquestionably, she is very fascinating, and in the opinion of the world you can plead extenuating circumstances, but imagine Diana old and ugly. There are men who do still cling to their old Dianas, and you may very possibly become one of them. If you wear out your wife's patience, she will separate from you, and then you will remain chained to your Englishwoman, and will pass your days drinking port and playing *béziq*ue with Sir James! Are you enchanted with the prospect? No? Then show that you are not a fool. Give up your sweetheart, who is, I would swear, the sweetheart of a good many others besides yourself, and become once more an honest man."

"I will, as sure as there is a God above!" cried Louis excitedly.

"Do not swear it, Louis, it is a bad sign—simply do it. But a letter will come to-morrow morning, and then good-bye to all your good resolutions."

With that she left him alone in the boudoir, and went to take Madame Hérault's place beside the invalid.

Hélène passed the first part of the night tolerably quietly,

but about two o'clock, Emilie, who had fallen asleep on the couch, was aroused by the sound of talking. She rose and in the semi-darkness of the room, saw Hélène leaning her elbow on the pillow, talking to herself, while her eyes were fixed and vacant. When Mademoiselle Lereboulley went to her and took her hand, she seemed to recognise her, and pursuing the idea which was troubling her—

“If I died, he would force that woman to leave her husband, and he would marry her. She would take my place in the house, she would occupy my chamber, and my child would be hers. How she looked at him in the church, as if she would have liked to steal him from me! All which belongs to me would be hers, and of me would be left not even a memory—a poor little name engraved upon a stone, and that would be all.”

Her head moved restlessly from side to side, and drops of perspiration stood out upon her forehead. Emilie leant over her, placed her cool hands upon the heated brow to instil some of her own calm reason into the weary, wandering brain, and gently said—

“You are in no danger, Hélène, and you will live to be happy.”

“I shall live; yes, I shall live,” returned the other eagerly. “I *will* live to defend those I love!”

Several times she repeated “I *will* live,” as if in the confusion of her thoughts this word of determination, which summed up her whole character, was the only one which presented itself clearly to her mind. Then, under Emilie’s pitying, sympathetic glance, her eyelids gradually closed, and when Rameau paid his visit the next morning he found her calmer, less feverish, and on a fair way to recovery.

Louis also less seemed agitated and nervous. He remained in his wife's room for a few minutes, giving many little tokens of his affection for her, demonstrations which H  l  ne, feeling thoroughly exhausted, received with melancholy pleasure ; henceforth, she could not give full expression to the feelings of her heart, for Diana's image would ever be between her husband and herself. However, she did not repel his advances, but she signed to Emilie to take him from the room.

She wished to reflect and to decide upon her line of conduct, and as soon as she regained full possession of her senses she began to deliberate, in a calm and unprejudiced manner, as to what she had better do in the painful position in which she was placed. When she saw Louis so attentive to herself, she thought, with indulgent wisdom, that he might very easily have been indifferent, and she did not curse life now she was unhappy, but persistently looked only on the bright side of things. She had a kind mother, a devoted friend, an adorable child, and she thanked Heaven for giving her so many things for which to be grateful, and did not despair for the future.

She now knew the exact intellectual and moral worth of her husband. To his weakness and inconsistency she had never been blind, but she had been vain enough to believe that she could bring him entirely under her own influence, and thus be his guide. But he had escaped her control, and another and a cleverer woman had brought him into subjection, only to lead him astray, and her sway must have been powerful indeed, since even the horror of falsehood and deception had not driven Louis back to the right path. Suspected, watched, discovered, forced to

blush before his wife and to conceal his doings from her, he had still continued to deceive her, and perhaps the only means of healing the wound within his gangrened heart would be to cauterise it with the white-hot iron.

Not for one second after or before the violent shock she had received did *Hélène* think of accepting and submitting to her ill-fortune. She would not surrender to the mistress, she intended to defend her rights as a wife. To her, her misfortune did not appear as a terrible exception which it behoved her to bewail with despairing moans. All men alike seemed to her weak, easily led by their vices, and as easily governed by their passions. She did not believe that *Louis* was worse than others, and she simply accepted humanity as she found it—very frail and very wicked. But she was convinced that with patience, determination, and indulgence she would succeed in rescuing her husband from the mire in which he was wallowing, and to this end she resolved not to speak to him of the encounter between *Lady Olifaunt* and herself, not to show him in any way that she was aware of his intrigue, not to make any scenes, but to wait until he himself furnished her with an opportunity to speak out, and then to throw herself heart and soul into the struggle which she was determined should only be ended by the final and irrecoverable defeat of either her rival or herself.

As if her brave resolves endued her with fresh strength, *Hélène's* convalescence was very rapid, and at the end of the week she was well again. During this week *Louis* had not left the house, and had shown his wife every care and attention affection could prompt. His first fretfulness soon passed and he regained his usual sunny temper, and *Hélène* attributed the change to joy at her own speedy recovery.

Had she been able to read her husband's heart, she would have blushed with shame.

After twenty-four hours' enraged expectation, Louis had at last received a few lines from Diana, in which she expressed herself as surprised at not having seen him since the concert at Lereboulley's, and addressed a few loving reproaches to him. But although his fury was a little appeased by the arrival of the note, Louis replied somewhat briefly that his wife was ill and that he could not leave her. Then Diana commenced an epistolary combat in the hope of forcing him to come and see her, if only for a moment, for she was very sure that if she could but entice him to her house, she could retain him there as long as she chose ; but he very wisely resisted her orders and entreaties, and, amused at the persistence with which he was pursued, kept out of reach of her seductions or her anger.

He had news of her through Thauziat, who never failed to call every day to inquire after H  l  ne, and who described to his friend Diana's irritation and the torments she inflicted on the unfortunate Lereboulley by way of avenging herself. They laughed over her anger together, for Thauziat had regained all his old good-humour, and only became serious when Louis spoke of going to see Lady Olifaunt again. Then his brows contracted, and, drawn in opposite directions by his ardent desire to see Louis definitely separated from his wife, and the fear of seeing H  l  ne suffer from such a separation, he cursed the husband's inconstancy as he decided to subordinate his own passion to the happiness of her he loved. Sometimes a sudden impulse of generosity urged him to cry aloud to Louis, " Fool that you are, take care ! You are surrounded

by snares and pitfalls, you cannot take one step farther along the path you have chosen without treading upon either your own or another's happiness," and one day he did say to his friend—

"You are very imprudent not to think more of looking after your own possessions, instead of plundering other people. If your wife ceased to love you, who knows if she would not find herself without defence against another man's love."

"But whose?"

"Oh, mine, to begin with."

"Pshaw! Surely two years have been long enough to extinguish that bright flame," replied Louis, laughing. "And, besides, do you think yourself so very dangerous? Make love to my wife, if you like, it will be something for you to do, and I am quite sure of her."

A deep furrow came on Thauziat's brow, and his lips curled in a disdainful smile. The depraved indifference Louis affected hurt instead of pleasing him, for he thought not of himself, but of her who was so slightly treated.

The day Madame Hérault was able to rise and walk about her room a little while, Louis at last made up his mind to call on Lady Olifaunt. It was four o'clock when he reached her house, and she and her husband had just come in. He found her lying on a divan in the Japanese drawing-room idly turning over the pages of a novel, while, in the next room, the door of which was open, Sir James could be heard opening and shutting the drawers of a cabinet. When she caught sight of Louis, Diana uttered an exclamation of joy which she immediately stifled, and, placing one finger on her lips, she seemed to enjoin upon

him a restraint to which he was unaccustomed. He was silently asking himself the meaning of her attitude when Sir James appeared with an exquisite miniature in his hand.

"Ah, is it you, Monsieur Hérault?" he said, with a cold smile. "Delighted I happened to be in when you called, will you not sit down? Diana, my dear, here is the portrait we were speaking of—Mademoiselle de Fontanges by Petitot, a very valuable painting. See if you like the way the hair is dressed."

"It is for a fancy-dress ball," explained Diana, as she looked at the miniature. "No, I do not think these curls will become me badly."

"It is some time since we have had the pleasure of seeing you," resumed Sir James, addressing himself to Louis. "Not since the concert at Lereboulley's; and since then I have been grieved to hear that you have had much worry and anxiety. Has your charming wife recovered from her indisposition?"

"Quite, thanks," answered Louis, very much astonished at this sudden interest in Hélène.

"I am very glad to hear it! Especially as we intend giving a ball in about a fortnight. Yes, we wish to return the hospitality we have received, and I trust you and Madame Hérault will be among our guests."

To Louis these words sounded like a declaration of war. He suspected a clever plot had been laid by the husband and wife, and wishing to know exactly how matters stood, he resolutely replied—

"I shall be most happy to come, Sir James, but I cannot promise that Madame Hérault will accompany me. She

has been ordered to take the greatest care, and I am afraid she will be unable to avail herself of your kind invitation."

The Englishman's face became hard and sullen as when he was arguing with Lereboulley about the value of a picture, or the authenticity of the last curiosity he happened to have acquired. He walked over to the fireplace, and, leaning his back against it with an air of authority, said stiffly—

"I am very sorry to hear that, both on Lady Olifaunt's account and my own. We have heard from several quarters that it has been remarked that we have only men at our gatherings—men, of course, of the best society, but still without their wives, their sisters, or their daughters. Malevolent people have laid hold of the fact to turn it against us, and therefore Lady Olifaunt and I have decided that in future our doors will no longer be open to those of our married friends who come to our house without their wives. Hitherto we have yielded to the charm of their friendship, but we must not disregard the opinion of the world. That is why I regret Madame Hérault's health is not in a state to permit of her coming to our ball, for the agreeable relations between yourself and us must therefore, I fear, be temporarily interrupted."

Louis rose, looking a little pale, and turning to Diana, who still lay on the sofa and who had not interfered with what her husband had said by word or gesture—

"If I do not mistake, madame, Sir James is forbidding me his door?"

A stifled murmur issued from Diana's lips which was midway between a moan and a burst of laughter, and that was her only answer.

“Forbidding you my door?” repeated Sir James, with a gesture of protestation. “I am too polite to act thus towards a gentleman, but you are too much a man of the world not to see the justice of what I have just said to you. However, I will leave you with Lady Olifaunt, who will explain the matter to you even better than I could do.”

He stretched out his hand to Louis, which the latter took with a feeling of repugnance, and after dropping a kiss on his wife’s forehead went out of the room. Hardly had the door closed behind him than Diana sprang to her feet, and turning a tear-stained face towards her lover—

“At last you are here!” she exclaimed. “You have not an idea what my life has been for the last week, and I did not dare write to you because I know how unsafe my letters are at your house. I do not know what abominable tales have been told to Sir James, but he is beside himself. He says that his honour is in peril, and that we must either change our mode of life here in Paris or return to England—”

“He would take you away?” broke in Louis. “Then it is with your consent, for he does nothing but what you wish.”

“He generally treats me like a spoilt child, I know; but when the question is a serious one—and what could there be more serious than what has happened? People are saying that you simply lived at my house. The terrible scene at Lereboulley’s has got about. How? No doubt through that horrid Emilie, for neither Thauziat, nor Lereboulley, nor your wife would have said anything about it. You know how jealous all these ugly, neglected old women are of me, and during this last week I have been so

insulted ! I cannot enter a drawing-room without my heart palpitating with fear. And I suffer all this through you. Oh, I am not complaining, but pray do all you can to prevent these annoyances."

She had made him sit down on the divan beside her, and, as she nestled up to him, she threw around him her white arm, left bare by the large sleeve of a loose gown of old rose satin which was merely confined at the waist by a golden girdle. Her blue eyes glistened beneath the tangle of yellow hair, her little head was resting on Louis' breast, and her smiling lips seemed to be seeking a kiss which she avoided immediately the young man's eager mouth approached hers. She intoxicated him with her breath and with the warm perfume her supple form exhaled, and in her desire to excite his passion she passed from coyness to affection and from the height of joy to the deepest despair with a suddenness and skill which made of her ten women united in one.

He, scorched by her eyes, drunk with her smiles, caught her by the shoulders and drew her within his arms. Again he was possessed by his feverish passion, and unconscious of everything but her presence. The memories of past voluptuousness returned to him, accompanied by the dream of fresh pleasures. He longed for Diana, he was angry with himself for having stayed away from her a whole week and wondered how he could have done it, and now he was ready to sacrifice everyone and everything in the world to call her his.

Then, with words mingled with kisses, Diana began to prove to him that it would not be very much to do for her to bring Madame Hérault to the ball. All that she wanted

was for H  l  ne to walk through the rooms, so that people could see she was there. It wouldn't matter after that what anyone said, for the answer would be ready—"It is a proof that Louis H  rault is not Lady Olifaunt's lover, his wife goes to her house." Of course it would be a little humbling to H  l  ne's pride, but what would that matter since she would be only making a slight reparation to the woman she had so cruelly insulted and outraged? And these perfidious arguments were followed by so many kisses that their treachery was hidden, and that Louis finally gave his word to make his wife consent to accompany him.

He was immediately rewarded for his cowardice by the most passionate demonstrations of affection. Diana thanked him over and over again, and even went so far as to shed tears. She was, in fact, transported with joy at the thought of the revenge she was going to take upon H  l  ne, and to Louis she repeated again and again the words, "I love you!" with a sincerity which was founded on a mortal hatred, while he, amidst these transports, never thought of the infamy of the promise he had made, or of the affront which would be inflicted on his wife and for which he would be partly answerable. What did it matter how or at what price he was gratified as long as his satisfaction was complete?

That evening, for the first time since H  l  ne's illness, he did not go home to dinner, and the next day he was simply coldly amiable, as he had been for too long a time. But H  l  ne, who knew him so well, could see that there was something unusual amiss with him. He was worried by an anxiety he carefully concealed, and his wife vainly sought to discover what fresh idea there was in this heart

henceforth closed to her. Emilie, when she questioned her, was unable to tell anything, but Hélène found out too soon the cause of her husband's anxiety.

One morning she found amongst her letters an invitation which ran as follows: "Sir James and Lady Olifaunt request the pleasure of Madame Hérault's society at a ball—"

Hélène read no farther. Had she seen on the thick, square card: "Hélène Hérault is Lady Olifaunt's slave, and can be ridiculed, insulted, or tortured by her with impunity," it would not have come as a greater shock to her. She did not hear Louis enter the room, and he came up to the arm-chair in which she was seated without her noticing his presence.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

She raised her head, cast a sorrowful glance upon her husband, and in silence gave him the card. He started, his lips tightened, and his eyes could hardly be seen beneath his contracted brows. A sharp pang shot through his heart, but he did not recoil before the shame of his bond. He merely looked at the card, and said carelessly—

"An invitation from the Olifaunts? Oh, yes, I had forgotten to speak to you about it."

"Then you knew we were going to receive one?"

"Yes," he replied, boldly; this man, generally so weak, became implacable when his resolution was taken.

Hélène shuddered at the clear, decided affirmation—she felt she was abandoned, sacrificed. Her anguish was so great that the tears sprang to her eyes, but still she continued her questions.

"You have not said that we will go?"

She murmured the words imploringly, as if she were entreating mercy. She would have softened the heart of an inquisitor, but it was to her husband she was speaking.

"I should have preferred to decline, and especially to have spared you the trouble of accompanying me," he replied; "but I have been forced to yield to peculiar circumstances, and I have promised—"

"But you know what people say of this woman?" she interposed gently.

"People say so many, and generally such stupid and such malicious things, that one oughtn't to take any notice of them. Lady Olifaunt is received everywhere—"

"But no one goes to her house."

"Because they have not had the opportunity. This will be the first time she has issued invitations to others than her intimate friends—"

"Of whom you are one."

"Of whom I am one, I am happy to say, for Lady Olifaunt is a charming and agreeable woman, and exceedingly devoted to her friends."

"And also to her lovers!"

"Hélène!"

By rapid gradations their voices had become higher as their words had become more bitter, and now, incensed by the violence with which Louis was attempting to vanquish her, Hélène started to her feet, trembling with indignation. A dull rage was urging her to use taunting words, and she felt a bitter pleasure in returning blow for blow in this terrible combat. She took a few rapid strides, then, with an accent of firmness and determination quite new to her husband, said—

"Listen, Louis. The present is one of the most serious hours of our lives, and we ought not to act as if the question were one of no importance, but to discuss it in all its bearings. Do me the justice to own that hitherto you have never heard me complain, though I have had good reason to do so. You have been false to me, and I have said nothing; you have told me lie after lie, and I have said nothing; you have exposed me to moral torture, so acute that it made me seriously ill and might have endangered the life of our child, and I have said nothing. But now, to contribute to your mistress's success, to add to her triumph, you wish to force me to follow and escort her as if I were her friend and your complacent wife, and this time I rebel. I have borne grief; I will not consent to disgrace. Tears, yes; shame, never!"

"Where is there any question of triumph, and what would constitute the disgrace?" returned Louis in a voice which shook, for the resistance he encountered was determined and he was naturally incapable of supporting a lengthened struggle. "All you are asked to do is simply to appear for a quarter of an hour in a drawing-room where all the best society in Paris will be assembled."

"I will not go to be stared at. Find myself the object of everybody's insolent curiosity, expose myself to the chance of hearing the serenity with which I should be forced to support the humiliation prepared for me praised or blamed! No, I refuse!"

For a moment Louis was silent, apparently reflecting. Then, as if he had found fresh reinforcements—

"It was you who inflicted humiliation, at Lereboulley's

the other evening ; it was Lady Olifaunt who was the object of curiosity when you insulted her before her friends and ours. Your presence at her house will have no effect, except that of lessening the injury you did her, and which she did not merit. For, though you accuse her, what proof have you of what you say ? Until now, I have disdained to defend myself, but now I suppose I must do so since your jealousy is the only obstacle to this necessary reconciliation."

"And which you are being forced to bring about, are you not ? And in return for which you will be adored, and which you are cruel enough to demand from me, and to which you think me weak enough to consent ! Well, then, undeceive yourself, and do not attempt any longer to abuse my good-nature. I know all that I need know, I do not suspect, I am certain. I have seen you going to keep your appointment, I have held in my hands the letter in which it was made. But however keenly I may have suffered from the blow, I was silent ; not from fear of you, but from affection for you. I hoped that when you saw my torture you would retrace your steps and return to the wife who really loves you, who never has loved and never will love anyone but you. But, instead of making you pity me, I only encouraged you in your misconduct. When you found the path of vice so easy, you delighted in it, and now you have so far lost all sense of morality as to ask me to hide the defects of the woman who has stolen you from me under the cloak of my spotless reputation. You request me to chaperon my rival, and your cheek would not flush if you saw us together hand in hand--your wife, the woman who bears your name, the mother of your son, in

close companionship with that shameless creature ! Come, Louis, think of it, return to your senses and do not give me the pain of seeing that you persist in spite of all I have said to you. Have you so little respect for me ? Come, tell me all. Into what horrible contract have you entered that you do not surrender to my arguments, that you do not yield to my prayers ? Did you really promise I should go ? ”

Deathly pale, his features drawn by the horror of this torture, Louis made no answer. He did not dare to look at *Hélène*, and, inert but unyielding, he stood motionless, his eyes vacantly staring at a flower on the carpet.

Hélène, with heart throbbing so fast that it almost suffocated her and quivering lips, but still mistress of her thoughts and resolute and strong in her determination, drew closer to him, took his hand, and forced him to look up.

“ Louis,” she said very gently, “ have you given your word that I shall go ? ”

He could not unclench his teeth, but he bent his head to intimate—yes.

“ Very well, then,” said *Hélène*, simply. “ You must not break it even to such people as these. I will go.”

This time he looked at her, and to his eyes she appeared increased by all her moral height. There was nothing of the martyr, nothing violent, nothing theatrical in her demeanour, she sacrificed her womanly dignity with the sweet gentleness of a mother. He would have spoken to her, but the words died in his throat, and he could only hold out his hand as though to ask forgiveness ; then, dropping into an arm-chair, he burst into sobs.

And as she, with an intense and pitying melancholy, saw him weep, Emilie's words returned once more to her memory—"a child, nothing but a child!" She bent over him and softly wiped away the tears which were coursing down his cheeks, and, as she did so, Louis seized one of the soothing hands, pressed it to his lips with tender respect, and then giving vent to all his misery—

"Oh, how base and cowardly I am!" he said. "And you, you are the bravest and most devoted of wives. What can there be in me that vice should have such an attraction for me that I cannot do without it? And yet I love you with my whole heart, I swear it, and you know it. I despise this woman, there are moments when I even hate her, and yet I cannot live without her. I reproach myself for the baseness of my conduct, I would throw myself at your feet to obtain your pardon, and yet if you asked me to swear that I would never return to my folly I should perjure myself, for I know I could not keep my oath. Oh, I implore you, you who are so strong, save me from myself, give me courage, honour. Why have you forsaken me, why have you left me to myself all this last year? I should not have committed all these faults if you had been always beside me to guide and protect me. I am a poor wretch, without courage and without honour, I have outraged and insulted you, and you, who are perfection, hardly address one word of reproach to me. Ah, what a brute I am, and how unworthy of your pity! Abandon me. Stay with my grandmother that she may have some one by her dying bed, but submit no longer to the torture I inflict upon you. And I will go away, you shall not see me again."

She looked at him reproachfully.

“And your child!” she said. “Have you forgotten him? Alas, I do not mind what happens to me, and I am ready for almost every sacrifice for your sake. I was only a poor, little work-girl living in a garret, when your grandmother came and took me by the hand, led me to your house and treated me as her daughter. I shall never forget that, and I shall discharge my debt to her and you by my devotion to you. If the worst comes to the worst, you can leave me, for you have the right to think that you have done enough for me by giving me your name, your fortune, and a whole year of happiness. But your child? You speak of going away, of never returning again; then do you think you owe him nothing? Think that one day he will look to you for an example, and you will not be able to fit yourself for the task all in a moment—it will need years of preparation. A mother alone is not sufficient for a son, and the father has serious duties to fulfil. Forgive me for speaking to you thus. You cannot know how much I love you, and what sacrifices I would make to make you better. All you need is a little firmness, for you are already good and generous. Promise me you will resist temptation and that you will return to us who love you truly. It would make us so happy, and Louis, it would be oh, so simple, so easy, and so sweet!”

As he listened he did think that it would be easy, simple, and sweet, he did think it would be better not to tell any more lies, not to be forced to all kinds of deception or to live under the load of a perpetual remorse. He thought of the happy days at Boissise, with their quiet peacefulness, their refreshing repose. Why should he not have such

days again, days when he felt free in heart and mind? Why should he not go away with *Hélène* to Italy or Spain, to a sunny land where he would be far from all intrigue and safe from every temptation? He opened his lips to cry: "Let us go away," but even as he did so, the blue eyes, the rosy lips, the golden hair of Lady Olifaunt suddenly appeared before his eyes and dispelled all his happy, salutary plans. Then his pride whispered: "What would your friends think of you? You will look like a naughty boy who obeys when he is scolded. Your wife's reprimand has reduced you to submission and repentance, are you then no longer the master? Fool to let yourself be taken in by high sounding phrases about family duties! Have such men as you any law but their own caprice? Can you be restrained by moral chains? Are you, like most martyrs, under the sway of childish prejudices? Or are you amongst the exceptional beings who know how to free themselves from social restraint?" In an instant his mind was changed and he thought himself a fool and an idiot for having almost yielded to such petty, everyday arguments. The demon which was within him gained the victory, and he became as cold as he had but just before been zealous. All trace of regret and repentance vanished, leaving in his heart but the one desire to satisfy his passions.

But he dared not boldly raise his head and say so. He took *Hélène's* hand, held it in his own, and again pressed it to his lips. But his wife had read his thoughts upon his face, she had seen him becoming gradually calmer and colder, and the affectionate words he addressed to her before he left her passed over her head like meaningless sounds. Then

when she was alone, she recognised the futility of her efforts and wept bitterly.

Thenceforth, she ceased to hope that she could, by her constant gentleness and untiring affection, triumph over her husband's ingratitude and bring him back to herself. But still she was not disheartened ; she did not make any change in her behaviour, and never had she been sweeter or more charming than she was during this trying time. She had defied destiny and she was ready to fight to the last, and she employed wonderful ingenuity in her efforts to please her husband, to attract him to her and to keep him. She endeavoured to ensnare him by coquetry and was delighted at her slightest success ; she made his home so agreeable that he had no excuse for not staying there, but she did not go so far as to admit Louis to her chamber. The victory of to-day would have been too dearly bought by the abandonment of the morrow, and she could not admit the idea of sharing her husband's caresses with another. He should be hers entirely or not at all, and, in the meantime, she knew so well how to present the appearance of a perfectly happy woman that old Madame Hérault, who always lived with the young couple, had not the slightest idea of the troubles which lay between them.

Since the scene between her husband and herself, Hélène had not once referred to Lady Olifaunt's ball. She hoped that at the last moment Louis would see the shame of his conduct and would say to her : " Do not let us go." But if he did not do so, she was resolved to accompany him, for she had fully decided upon the heroic sacrifice. She had asked Emilie if she had received an invitation.

" Yes," Mademoiselle Lereboulley had replied. " Diana

has set her heart on having at least one honest woman at her house that evening."

"Then there will be two—you and myself."

Emilie had frowned and had only said: "Ah?" but she had looked at Hélène as if she would penetrate her very soul.

The following day Thauziat and Hélène happened to meet at a friend's house, and, after a few unimportant words had been exchanged, Clément suddenly asked—

"Is it true that you are going to Lady Olifaunt's to-morrow evening?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because she is boasting that you will be there."

"Is it then something for her to be proud of?"

"Exceedingly proud."

"So much the better if she is satisfied. I, myself, attach but very slight importance to the event."

"Then you are not jealous?"

"No, not now."

Then, turning a little paler, she added with a laugh, which sounded forced—

"After a time one becomes accustomed to everything, you know."

He fixed his dark, soft, melancholy eyes on her and gravely said—

"I pity you from the bottom of my heart."

She raised her head.

"You need not do so," she said almost roughly. "I do not wish for pity, and I am not in need of consolation."

"You cannot prevent me thinking that fate has been most unkind to you, or from wishing that you may be

happy even at the cost of pain to myself," he replied. "I have not changed, as you are very well aware. Some men can be faithful to their love."

"For what, then, do you hope?" she demanded, looking at him haughtily.

"For nothing. But I love you, and I seek your society because it is happiness to me to see you and to hear you speak. I pity you, because you bear your trouble so bravely, and I only wish I could prevent you committing heroic follies which will not make the man, for whose sake you do them, think any better of you, but which will lower you in the opinion of the world. You are bound to receive cruel wounds in the fight you have begun, for your weapons are not equal to your opponents'. They wear the armour of indifference and malice, while you have neither gauntlet nor breast-plate. They are hypocritical and sly, you are frank and true. It is impossible for you to win."

He paused, but she could not speak, for it seemed to her as if she had just heard her death-warrant pronounced. And yet she guessed that even now he had not told her all, and she glanced at him with entreating eyes. He seemed to understand her, for he answered—

"You do not know your husband, and you have been going the wrong way to work with him from the very first. He is a man who has neither affection nor esteem save for those who offer him resistance. You have been good and gentle to him, and he has tortured you—he was certain to do so. But there is still time. Be harsh and implacable, and, above all, refuse to humble yourself before your rival."

Then, as she sadly shook her head—

“You will not? Then there is nothing more to say. But do not forget that I have been disinterested enough to give you this advice, and remember that you will always find in me a friend who is passionately devoted to you.”

And with a sigh, he bowed and left her, and *Hélène* returned home grave and thoughtful.

When the morning of the ball arrived, Louis could not conceal his nervousness though he conversed with affected gaiety and paid no attention to his wife's sad seriousness. He passed the whole day at his office at Saint Denis, only returning home just in time for dinner. As they rose from table, he asked his wife, shortly—

“Shall you be ready to start by eleven o'clock?”

“Yes,” she answered, giving up all hope of Louis yielding to a better feeling.

Then, followed by old *Madame Hérault*, she went to her room and stayed for a moment, playing with her child, but there she felt so thoroughly miserable that she was totally unable to restrain her tears. The startled old grandmother went to her, took her hands and questioned her, but she refused to answer. Her grief was hers and hers alone, it sprang from her love and she guarded it jealously. She soon composed herself and began to dress, and by eleven o'clock she was ready. But she would not go down to the drawing-room as she generally did—she awaited Louis in her own room. At last he came for her, thinking, a little impatiently, that she was late; but when he saw her, he paused in surprise at her beauty.

She had put on a white dress, embroidered with pearls. There was no ornament of any kind around her neck, but in her hair, which was slightly waved, she wore a little

aigrette, which gave her an air of pride and *hauteur*. She advanced to meet her husband, and, taking him by the hand, drew him into the next room where her little boy was sleeping. Parting the curtains of the cot, she showed him the child, fresh and rosy as a flower. Louis bent over his son, gazed at him in silence, then leant down and kissed him. As he did so, Hélène's heart seemed to leap into her mouth, and she almost cried, "For his sake, stay here with me!" But Louis had already raised his head again, and was fingering his tie to see that it was not disarranged.

The young mother saw that her last effort had been in vain, and drawing the curtains with tender respect, as if she had been veiling a temple from scoffing eyes—

"Come, let us go," she said.

CHAPTER X.

DIANA, beaming with pride and satisfaction, had pressed the hand of the woman who had insulted her and had presented to the eyes of the stupefied Lereboulley the unexpected spectacle of Madame Hérault walking through Lady Olifaunt's drawing-rooms on Sir James's arm, and now, light and airy as a butterfly in her blue gauze dress, she was going from group to group receiving everybody's compliments and smiles.

All the prettiest women and the best known men in Parisian society were there, and all these elegant women and handsome men dancing with so much animation and enjoyment really formed a very pretty picture. Fans were fluttering before white breasts like butterflies' wings, diamonds were gleaming and sparkling on alabaster necks and skirts were lightly whirling round as if borne along in a dazzling flight on the breeze of the melodies the orchestra was giving forth.

Fat, round, and rosy, Lereboulley was at the height of his delight amidst this brilliant throng enjoying themselves in this beautiful house. One would almost have thought it was he who was giving the ball. He passed along in Diana's wake, drinking in the words of praise, compromising his mistress by his look of pride and satisfaction, and totally forgetful of Sir James, who was testing his guests' luck at a card-table. The senator could see now that the pretended *liaison* between Louis and Diana did not exist.

Since Madame Hérault was there, smiling and calm, seated with Emilie, among some more young married women, she must have received proof that her suspicions were unfounded, and Lereboulley could breathe freely now he was sure his happiness was not in any way endangered. For the first time for a fortnight he chatted familiarly with Louis, and joked as he looked at the young man with an air of benevolence.

“I say, my boy, every pretty woman in Paris is here this evening. If the house caught fire and no one could get out, the men wouldn’t know how to dispose of their hearts to-morrow.”

He laughed at his own ponderous wit, and, seeing Diana approaching, advanced to meet her.

The beautiful Englishwoman drew him aside, and said with an air of triumphant innocence—

“Well, you see she is here, and she doesn’t look as though there is much the matter.”

“Yes, yes, and I am delighted. I like all the Héraults very much, but I love my little Diana still more. You are looking deucedly lovely this evening, and Louis’ wife is the only woman I can see who can be at all compared with you. If you forsook me she would be the only one who could console me for your loss.”

There was a gleam of demoniacal malice in Lady Olifaunt’s eyes as she replied—

“Then you would most probably be doomed to die of grief. Thauziat is there before you.”

“Thauziat ?” repeated Lereboulley in amazement. “You are mad, Diana. Madame Hérault is the most virtuous of women, she loves no one but her husband.”

"Then what am I who sacrifice mine for you?" broke in lady Olifaunt angrily. "Not up to much, I suppose?"

"You, Diana, are the embodiment of terrestrial perfection, but Madame Hérault—"

"Oh, I am sick of hearing about Madame Hérault! An extraordinarily lucky work girl whom you treat as if she were a duchess! What is there so wonderful about her? Phauziat is mad about her, and you, yourself, are becoming foolish on the same point. Go and talk to her. She will tell you all about her brat's appetite, and describe the emotions incidental to the cutting of the first tooth, for not only is she the most virtuous of women, but also the best of mothers. And a lot of good that does her husband!" And she burst into a laugh.

"I have vexed you, Diana. Come, forgive me."

"No! Go after the most virtuous of her sex. I am only a pretty woman; I have not the qualities you require."

So saying, she turned her back on him and went into the card-room.

He followed her with his eyes, and saw her go up to Louis. She took his arm, whispered to him in caressing fashion, and then the senator saw them slowly leave the room together.

Lereboulley seated himself at a table, and began to play *carté*. Generally he played the game well, but that night he made error after error, for his thoughts were not on what he was doing. Why had Diana taken Louis' arm, and what had she said to him? Where had they gone? What were they doing? All these questions rushed through his brain, and to none of them could he find a satisfactory answer. The ill temper Diana had so suddenly

displayed to him had made him uneasy in the first place, and the good terms on which she appeared to be with Louis had succeeded in thoroughly arousing his fears. The perspiration stood out upon the big man's forehead as he asked himself if he had not been deceived by Lady Olifaunt, and if at this very moment she might not be laughing at him with Hérault.

He threw down his cards, settled his losses, and hastily walked towards the door by which he had seen the couple, who now seemed to justify his suspicions, leave the room. In the smaller drawing room, which was full of men and their partners, he could see neither Louis nor Diana. Madame Hérault, looking a little pale, was sitting talking to Emilie on a divan which, placed between the mantelpiece and the door, formed a sort of little nook whither no one came to disturb them. Lereboulley nodded to them, and passed on. In the corridor, still no trace of those he was seeking. The staircase which led to the second floor was ablaze with light, and the landing-place, with its marble columns, had been turned into a refreshment-room. The strains of the orchestra sounded softly in the distance, couples were coming up and going down, their talk and laughter blending into a joyous murmur, and the chinking of silver and china testified to the honour Sir James's guests were doing to his hospitality.

The senator went up the short flight of stairs and found himself in the corridor leading to Diana's bedroom. The refreshment-room had attracted a crowd, but the corridor was deserted. There was a soft light issuing from the half-opened door of the boudoir, and when he saw it Lereboulley's heart stood still—he had a presentiment that

beyond that door he would find Louis and Diana. An intense longing to know his fate urged him to go forward, and yet he dared not, and he dropped on to a seat, his face working with emotion as he asked himself, "Shall I go in, or shall I not?"

Louis and Diana had, in fact, come the same way as Lereboulley. They had crossed the smaller drawing-room without seeing Hélène and Emilie sitting in their corner, they had gone up to the refreshment-room, and finding the corridor empty, had entered Diana's boudoir, which was only lighted by one lamp, and they had stayed in the semi-darkness, enjoying the coolness and quiet of the room and the shadows which rested their eyes. What, in the corridor was only a stifled noise, was there no more than a murmur, and the soft harmonious tumult which reminded them that the house was *en fête* was just enough to make this temporary peacefulness the more delicious.

Lady Olifaunt as she stood by the mantelpiece just touched by the soft rays of the lamp had the airy gracefulness of a phantom. Louis could not take his eyes from her, and at last he said, drawing nearer to her—

"Well, Diana, you see I have obeyed you, although the sacrifice you demanded from me was the greatest I could possibly make; what reward am I to have?"

"Do you want a reward for having given a proof of love to a woman who risks so much simply to please you? I love you, is not that enough?"

"Say that again."

"Do you doubt it?"

"No, but it is such happiness to hear you say it. From your lips, the words have a charm I never suspected they

possessed. Ah, Diana, what powerful spell do you possess that you are able to make a man oblivious of everything and everybody but yourself? Each time I have tried to tear myself away from you I have been compelled to return to your feet by a force stronger than my will. You say that you risk much for me, but what do I not risk for you? The happiness and peace of mind of those nearest to me. If you are guilty, I must be a hundred times more so! Then, love me dearly, for your love now is the only joy I have."

He had uttered these words with an ardour which was almost convulsive. Diana moved yet closer to him, and, clasping her white arms around his neck, she said in tender, vibrating tones—

"I love you, and you alone."

As she spoke a stifled cry fell on their ears, and turning round, they saw on the threshold of the boudoir (which he had entered through the bedroom) Lereboulley. Pale as death, his legs shaking under him, his lips trembling, he was gazing at them in despairing amazement. He had entered the room just in time to see Diana embrace Louis and to hear her confession of love, and, paralysed by the shock, he stood motionless, unable to give expression to his thoughts. But there could be no doubt that they were terrible, for as he stood he clenched and unclenched his fists as though preparing for the combat. At last he uttered a shriek of rage, and rushing upon Diana, who was impassively awaiting his attack—

"Wretch!" he yelled. "Shameless woman!"

Without retreating a step, she pointed to the door with an ironic laugh.

"I do not allow anyone to shout in my house," she said haughtily. "And besides, by what right do you dare to come in here and threaten me? Are you my husband?"

To these words, which so clearly defined their relative positions, the old man only replied by a sullen look. He felt in what a false position he was placed, he understood that the authority he claimed over Diana he held from herself alone, and that by a word she could deprive him of it. In a second he calculated the immensity of the loss he was in danger of suffering, and realised that life would be impossible without the woman who filled it for him with delight and pride. He asked himself if it would not be wiser to descend to the shame of craving forgiveness and of submitting to everything, but he still had a vague idea of offering some resistance. "I am rich enough to make all hesitation between Louis and myself impossible for her," he thought. And then, as another wave of fury passed over him, he threw prudence to the winds.

"It is true I am not your husband," he cried, "but I am your lover—"

Diana did not give him time to finish his sentence, but leaning on Louis' shoulder with voluptuous grace—

"Here is my lover," she said.

"Diana!" exclaimed the amorous Lereboulley, overwhelmed by the confession. "Diana, there is yet time for you to think. I have heard nothing, I do not wish to know anything; I have forgotten all. But do not treat me with such barbarity. You are displeased, and you have a right to be, but I was carried away by my anger, and I forgot myself. You know I love you—Diana—"

He saw that she was perfectly unmoved as she stood

looking at him with her blue eyes, cold and shining as steel. Then, with a gesture of indignant revolt—

“Oh, to let me humiliate myself in vain before this boy, I an old man, after all the kindness I have shown you! No one will ever love you as I have loved you. I have been delighted to submit to your every caprice; you have not had a fantasy I have not gratified; you have only had to speak, and I have never counted cost if I could please you. You are rich, you have the most costly jewels in Paris; your house is kept in princely style, and I am ready to increase my prodigality. If you had remained faithful to me, I should have left you a portion of my fortune at my death, for I cared for you as for my daughter, and I am old, you would not have had very long to wait. Diana, reflect; it is worth the trouble, for once I have passed the threshold of this door all will be over between us, and I will never return.”

Diana began to laugh, and looking at him in a way which sent a thrill all over him, replied coldly—

“You will return whenever I choose. I shall only have to reckon you.”

He bent under this insolent bravado as if he were going to throw himself on his knees.

“Yes, that is true. I feel I shall return, but spare me the pain of going.”

He went up to her, took her by the hand, drew her into the window, and fixing his ardent eyes upon her—

“What must I do to make you willing to retain me? Submit to all, to the shame of being no longer the master here, to the torture of sharing your caresses with another? Well, I will do that, for then at least I shall still have you,

and if I shut my eyes to your misdoings you will know how to give me the illusion of happiness."

"No," replied Diana, harshly.

"Do you love him, then?"

"I almost think I do, so strong is my hatred for his wife," she replied in a lower tone, stealing a furtive glance at Louis.

"He cannot do as much for you as I have done. He will be ruined in a year."

"So much the better. Then she will be reduced to misery."

"If that is what you are aiming at, it can soon be accomplished," returned Lereboulley, with a cruel laugh. "But why dismiss me?" he went on entreatingly. "Why, Diana?"

"My house will still be open to you, as to my other friends. It will only be for you to come."

"Never will I enter it on those terms. My suffering would be too great. Listen, Diana: do not push me to extremities. I would do anything, even the basest action, to keep you all my own. Take care that I do not warn your husband."

"Do so, if you like."

"He would kill Louis."

"It would be against you he would turn as a slanderer." She moved away from him, then went on—

"But do go away, you are simply tiring me. You have decidedly changed for the worse. A year ago, you would not have talked so ridiculously."

Tears of mingled rage and humiliation flowed from Lereboulley's eyes, tears which were at once dried by his burn-

ing cheeks. He shook his large shoulders, and said in a choking voice—

“Then good-bye, Diana.”

He paused before Louis, who had not assisted at this scene unmoved, and nodding his huge head—

“And as for you, I’ll make you pay for this.”

He went out of the room, and, as soon as he had gone, Louis and Lady Olifaunt drew close to one another. Then taking the young man’s hand and pressing it in her own, as if in conclusion of a compact—

“You have talked to me of the sacrifices you have made for my sake,” said Diana, “but I think you will own now that mine are equal to yours.”

He would have spoken, but she closed his mouth with her white hand, and with a bewitching smile—

“Love me. That is all I ask in return.”

Then they left the room, and found themselves again amidst the noise and animation of the ball.

From that day, Louis lived in a state of mental and moral agitation such as he had never experienced before. He wished to be a worthy successor to Lereboulley, and he was as lavish as ever the senator could have been. His vanity was matched against Diana’s wants, the result being a struggle in which gold flowed more freely than blood upon a field of battle, and he soon saw that his fortune must ere long be exhausted. Lereboulley’s financial transactions formed a reservoir which the senator would never drain dry; why should not he, Louis, have a similar supply at his command? There had been nothing to stand in the way so far but his own indolence, and the need in which he now stood of procuring large sums overcoming his sloth,

for the first time in his life he began to work really hard. His vice gave him courage, and, as he was not a fool, at first he was successful in his operations.

But his gains on the Stock Exchange seemed to him too uncertain. His luck might turn, and the happy results of to-day be counterbalanced by the bad results of to-morrow, so he sought and discovered a more trustworthy lever with which to raise his fortunes. The submarine cable project was on the eve of being carried out. The application for shares had been tremendous, and already the financial world was bestowing its attention on the floating of the important scheme. The whole of Europe was interested in the result, for, owing to the competition, the tariff for messages would most probably be lowered to half the existing price, and thus trade would be very largely benefited by the facilities created by the new company. England was very hostile to the plan, and her Government had officially intervened, through her ambassador at Paris, while the English seemed disposed to take up a large number of the shares, so as to have the upper hand in the management of the company, but Lereboulley took care that so many of the shares should be held by himself and his friends that the influence of the French shareholders would predominate. Under these circumstances there was bound to be a rig in the shares as soon as the bill for the laying of the cable had been passed by Parliament, and there seemed likely to be no difficulty about that, for Lereboulley had said he would introduce it, and his political friends being in the majority, both in the Chamber and in the Senate, all ought to go as smoothly as possible. Besides, the project was a straightforward, advantageous, and essentially patriotic one.

It was on this commercial operation, with all the ins and outs of which he was thoroughly acquainted, that Louis proposed to speculate to such an extent as to make by the one transaction a sum large enough to enable him to make a generous provision for Diana's needs. Each week he saw Lereboulley at the preparatory meetings, but the senator always carefully avoided him, and though they acknowledged each other on arriving, they did not speak.

One day Thauziat took Louis aside and said to him—

“Lereboulley wants you out of this business; he says he finds it extremely unpleasant to be continually meeting you, and he has asked me to propose an arrangement to you by which you are to forego the manufacture of the cable and to receive twelve hundred thousand francs as indemnity for the trouble you have already been put to. The work is not yet begun, the whole affair hardly commenced. Think it over.”

“There is nothing to think over. I refuse. Does Lereboulley think he can do as he likes with me? I should be losing a large profit. The manufacture of the cable is mine by agreement, and I am to be paid for it partly in money, partly in shares. It means a fortune to me. My father had anticipated this speculation, for it is now nearly ten years since the scheme was first thought of, and I am not going to give up all that has been done by my firm for twelve hundred thousand francs. The senator's got a cheek, upon my word!”

“Do you want more?”

“I want nothing but my rightful share.”

“You are foolish; he will put many difficulties in your way.”

“What difficulties?”

“Oh, all sorts. He will pretend that the work is being badly done, he will give you the shortest time possible in which to complete it, will make you behind-hand with it, and then you will find yourself involved in law suits. He is very sharp, and he simply abominates you. Why the devil did you take Diana from him? I warned you—”

“She is the prettiest woman in Paris.”

“The prettiest woman in Paris you have in your own home—Madame Hérault. But will you not come to some arrangement?”

“No!”

“Then beware, for you will have no mercy shown you.”

“I have no fear.”

“So much the better. In any case, remember that I tried to open your eyes, and do not ever reproach me for what may happen.”

“Good gracious, you are quite tragic! We are discussing business not war, nobody’s going to be killed.”

“I hope not.”

Then Thauziat changed his tone, and becoming as gay as he had just been serious—

“Well, and what are you making of Sir James?”

Louis began to laugh.

“Oh, only what he is accustomed to being.”

“Do you play cards with him?”

“No, he is too lucky.”

“Then he must miss Lereboulley a good deal.”

“I think Lereboulley misses Sir James a good deal more than Sir James misses Lereboulley. The husband formed the most agreeable part of his *liaison* with the wife. What

a pity that these two beings, who were made for each other in spite of their apparent want of union, should have been separated ! Shall we reconcile them again ? I would rather drop Diana than the cable ! ”

“ Are you speaking seriously ? ” exclaimed Thauziat, closely watching his friend.

“ No, I am joking,” answered Louis, becoming very grave again.

“ So much the worse.” And with that they parted.

Whatever he had said, Louis was not joking when he spoke of “ dropping ” Diana. If she had not held him by his vanity, which was the chief trait in his character, it is not unlikely that he would have already found the yoke she imposed upon him too heavy for his weakly shoulders, and, changeable and inconstant as a woman, would soon have become tired of the double life he was forced to lead. It is true he did not stand in any fear of either scenes or reproaches from his family. Old Madame Hérault was ignorant of the sad truth, for Hélène would have died rather than let the old woman know what was going on, and, as for herself, never since the explanation which had taken place before the Olifaunts’ ball, had she uttered a word to Louis which could have been construed into a remonstrance or complaint. Never was a woman with a husband so wanting in courage and dignity so noble and so proud. If she wept, it was in secret and in the silence of the night. She was only twenty-five, she was beautiful and charming, and she was forsaken. But she did not pose as a victim, she did not draw attention to her sorrow, she did not call God or man as witness to her grief. For all revenge she contented herself with being sweeter,

gentler, more charming than she had ever been before, and to the curious, mocking gaze of the world she presented so calm and quiet an appearance that many people began to doubt her misfortune.

But those who knew that Louis was sacrificing Hélène to Lady Olifaunt, felt their sympathy for the young wife increased tenfold. By dint of her severity she had disarmed ridicule and turned her trouble into a kind of apotheosis, and she was looked upon as a martyr, smiling radiantly amidst her suffering, and boldly confessing her faith whatever torture she might have to endure as the result.

Diana, on the other hand, was falling as her rival was rising in people's opinion. Maintained in society as she had been by Lereboulley's influence still more than by the *prestige* of her beauty, the Englishwoman realised as soon as the senator was away from her how useful he had been. But she was not easily dismayed. She had risen from too low a sphere for any position not to seem high to her, and she was sure of always having beneath her hand a power which nothing resists, viz., an immense fortune.

To occupy her leisure time and to get still more out of Louis, she had taken it into her head to speculate in building, and, having bought a large amount of ground in the vicinity of the Champs-Élysées, she proceeded to raise houses on it. Louis had made all agreements with the builders, and the ground being Diana's and the houses his, the speculation seemed very likely to turn out a good one. At any rate it had these advantages about it, that he did not see the gold he showered upon his love wasted in things of which she tired in a day, and that he knew he was enriching in the most lavish way the woman towards

whom Lereboulley had played the part of a vain and ostentatious Jupiter.

But there was this drawback, that, having concluded the bargains, Hérault had to face the necessity of paying away considerable sums at fixed periods, and for some time now he had found the greatest difficulty in procuring the money he needed. The companies in which Lereboulley was concerned and in which he—Louis—had taken his father's shares, were dull and drooping. It was almost as if some secret influence were keeping them down, and that the man who generally knew so well how to make the very best of them was wilfully neglecting them. There was no longer any benefit to be derived from them, the dividends were decreasing, and they yielded hardly interest on the money invested.

Louis, irritated by this state of stagnation, sold a large number of the shares he held, and at once, as if by enchantment, every one of the things he had got out of sprang into life again and resumed their old activity, while the dividends again became what they had been during the years of prosperity. Louis was forced to yield to this evidence and to own to himself that Lereboulley was carrying on against him a deliberately-planned campaign, for everything in which they were both interested fell and did not rise again until the senator had made his rival sell out, and thus Thauziat's warnings were being justified.

Instead of making Louis reflect, this systematic hostility only exasperated him, and even if he had not been already bound to Diana by the strong chains of pleasure, he would have attached himself to her out of sheer hatred for Lereboulley. The struggle between the two men was violent on both sides, but there could be no doubt of the

result, and Louis was as foolish to fight the senator as would be a dwarf to dream of attacking a giant. This Goliath was too strong for the David, and, besides, Diana was there to cut the cords of his sling.

Lying in ambush in the midst of all these intrigues like a spider in the centre of its web, Lady Olifaunt watched Louis and awaited the moment when he would fall never to rise again. Very cunningly had she crossed and recrossed the threads of her snare so as to embarrass the progress of him of whom she ought to have been the loyal ally, but of whom she was the secret enemy, and thus she was satisfying at one and the same time the rancour she bore the man who had disdained and humiliated her when she had loved him, and her hatred for the woman who had deprived her of him whom she had honoured by her capricious favour. By striking one she wounded the other, and thus her work of malice was two-edged.

What redoubled her fury was Hélène's perfect stoicism. If Madame Hérault had wept and moaned and displayed a nature which was weak, Lady Olifaunt would have ceased to molest her in disdain. But the young wife's face was superb in its tranquillity, and as she shielded herself behind her maternity with triumphant pride, it was as if she had said, "You have taken my husband from me, but you cannot rob me of my child. Your love is intoxicating, but it is barren. You have tasted nearly every joy, but there is one which will be unknown to you—the pure divine love which springs to life within a mother's heart."

Often, as she drove down the Champs Elysées in her superb equipage, did Diana meet Madame Hérault in her quiet carriage, and not once did the wife lower her eyes.

She had beside her her son, who could walk now, and whom she was taking to play in the Bois ; and Lady Olifaunt, who had deprived her of everything—happiness in the present and safety for the future—longed sometimes to throw herself upon her rival and destroy her beauty. For never had Hélène been so beautiful as at this time. The slightly haughty expression of her face had given place to one more gentle. Her eyes were liquid with melancholy tenderness, and her firmly-cut mouth had relaxed the rigidity of its lines to wreath itself into loving curves. The mother had become more smiling for her child, and it made the woman irresistibly fascinating.

Sometimes, when he dined with his grandmother and his wife, Louis stayed in the drawing-room with them afterwards as in the time when he had first begun to love Hélène, and would seat himself in silence by the fireplace, looking vaguely around him, as if he hardly knew where he was. The somewhat solemn look of the vast room was a change to him after Lady Olifaunt's knick-knack crowded house. He found himself in an atmosphere of peacefulness, he breathed an air which was pure, he felt himself surrounded by a stillness which rested him after the hurry of his business, the anxieties of his speculations, and the enervation of his devouring passion.

One evening, Hélène, seating herself at the piano, absently turned over the leaves of a book of old melodies, and sang with exquisite feeling, though her voice was not very strong, the well-known ballad, "*Portrait charmant, portrait de mon amie.*" Louis, as he lay back in his arm-chair, did not stir, but when old Madame Hérault, to whom the old-fashioned airs recalled her youth, saw Hélène preparing to

close the piano, she slipped her long knitting-needles behind her ear and clapping her hands, cried, "*Encore !*"

Hélène smiled, resumed her seat and commenced the air, "*Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment.*" She had not chosen it intentionally, the book had opened at that place, and she had sung the first thing she saw, but she put into her voice a passionate accent of pain which seemed to come straight from her heart. As the last chords died away in silence, she rose from her seat with a sigh, and close behind her she saw Louis, his head lying back on the arm-chair, and the tears running down his pale cheeks. She turned quickly to him under the sway of an impulse she could not resist, and, taking his hand in hers, said, in tones full of the compassion with which her heart was overflowing—

"What is it?"

His lips moved as if he were going to speak, then with an irritated gesture he rose, saying—

"I am a little nervous this evening. I will go out, I think. Good-night!" And he went out of the room.

The two women went on with their work as if nothing had happened, but Hélène did not feel quite so sad as before, for it seemed to her as if some of the evil in Louis' heart had just been washed away by his tears. If she had only known with what anxieties his heart was at that time being racked she would have forgiven him all the suffering he had caused her.

A few days later a corner of the veil which hid the preparations for the last episode of the battle she was fighting was raised. One morning, Emilie, who was within the enemy's camp, said to her friend—

"Is it long since Madame Hérault gave your husband a power of attorney?"

“ I don’t know. Why ? ”

“ Because he has just mortgaged the property she possesses for two millions, and has sold a large number of the railway shares.”

“ Well, he has the right to do as he thinks best. He has the management of it all.”

“ He has no right to ruin his grandmother, while she is in perfect ignorance of what is going on, and to let her run the risk of being turned out of her own house at her age by a mortgagee. I know what I am talking about. Your husband is simply mad, he is doing his very best to get ruined as fast as he can, and he will bring you all to want. You ought to talk to him, and see if there is no way for him to retrieve himself.”

“ I will never do that ! ” exclaimed H  l  ne decidedly. “ For his moral welfare I will do all that lies within my power, but in nothing else will I interfere. When I am thinking of nothing but my shattered happiness, shall I appear to be worried by monetary cares ? Shall I expose myself to an offer from Louis to ensure our fortune, when I would give my life to obtain from him pledges of repentance ? No, I will never consent to such a thing. I came into this house poor, what does it matter if I go out of it poor ? ”

She paused for a moment, then continued—

“ Besides, I hate this money which is the cause of all my sorrows. If Louis is ruined he will be compelled to become steady and hard-working again, and God knows that if by poverty he is restored to me, I shall bless poverty ! ”

Emilie looked at the young wife with admiring eyes, then she answered, shaking her head—

“ Ah, if you were dealing with a man worthy the name,

you might hope for anything. But all the courage will be on your side. Louis, when he finds himself at the end of his resources, will do something rash. He may allow Lady Olifaunt to carry him off—”

“I shall find the way to win him from her.”

“And supposing that, instead of carrying him off, she throws him over, and that in a moment of discouragement—”

Hélène turned pale, but she answered resolutely—

“I shall read his intention in his eyes. He can hide nothing from me.”

“Beware. It is a terrible game you are playing.”

“Can I act otherwise? It was not I who began it, but now that it is commenced, I will continue it to the end without flinching. Heaven will not forsake me.”

As Emilie had said, Louis’ position was becoming very critical. The net in which he was struggling was being drawn tighter and tighter week by week, and, simply exasperated by the resistance with which all his efforts were met, he persisted in the course he had chosen with the obstinacy of a gambler.

For a moment Thauziat felt pity for him and tried to soften Lereboulley, but the senator’s animosity was such that he would not even listen to the man who, now Diana was no longer the favourite, was the only person who had any real influence over him. He fell into a rage, and exclaimed with a violence which was not habitual to him—

“How absurd you are to come and talk to me in his favour after what he has done to you! Why don’t you revenge yourself instead? Or rather leave me to myself, and I will undertake to give my fine fellow such a lesson

that we shall never hear of him again. And, *parbleu* ! it will not be a disagreeable task to console his wife when she is deserted or a widow. She has had so much to put up with that she won't be very exacting."

To this Thauziat made no reply—he was already more than half gained over to the bad cause which was to place Hélène in his arms, and, as Lereboulley had advised him, he let things alone, although his wishes would have had sufficient weight even then to re-establish the equilibrium and so save Louis.

His disaffection and moral infirmity were a great trial to Emilie. She could not bear to see the man she had always thought superior to other men thus lowering himself, and she determined to speak to him about it. To this end she said to him one evening—

"Is it long since you saw Louis ?"

He started, and answered —

"Yes, a long while."

"Then don't you go to Lady Olifaunt's now ?"

"Hardly ever ?"

"Did it make you too sad to see the poor boy ruining himself ?"

He said nothing, but fixed his searching eyes upon her.

"You got him out of a scrape once," Emilie continued, "out of friendship for me ; and if you chose you can do the same again now. One word from you would render useless all my father's efforts. You have only to raise your hand to stop the financial engines which are to crush the poor fellow to atoms ; will you not do so ?"

Still he said nothing. She placed her hand firmly upon his shoulder and asked him—

“Thauziat, are you no longer the honourable man I loved?”

With a terrible laugh he presented to her gaze a face upon which could be traced the violence of the passions which were rending his heart.

“No! I am no longer that man!”

“And what has so quickly changed you?”

“My love for a woman! I have had enough of enduring pain simply to remain faithful to ideas of honour that I alone respect. Because Louis has robbed me of her. I love, I suppose he ought to be sacred to me. That is the chivalrous maxim you are quoting in his favour, I believe? I ought to be ready to give my heart's blood to protect and save him, since it was his hand that dealt the blow which causes me such cruel suffering. You tell me he is my friend, almost my brother, and that I am betraying and deserting him, that I am pushing him to the edge of a precipice, and so I am base and dishonourable! But what is he? He calls this woman, for whose loss I can find no consolation, his, and he is false to her. He is indeed a loyal husband, and others ought truly to be loyal to him! He has an adorable child who ought to be the delight of his life and the hope of his future, and he is doing his best to ruin him for the sake of a woman who is a disgrace to her sex. Isn't it affecting to see such a loving father? He deserves to be protected from himself! He has had every chance of happiness, and of his own free-will he has thrown it all away. He has failed in all his duties, he has had neither respect for the mother nor affection for the child. And am I bound to show him the consideration he has never shown to others? No, his vices must be his shield,

and he must find protection in his follies ! Because he is threatened with destruction by his own fault, I ought to rescue him from peril ? What nonsense ! I should be foolish to attempt it and insincere as well. Let him fall, since he has been neither wise enough to avoid the fight nor brave enough to come off victorious ! ”

As he spoke, his passion had risen and his broad forehead had become crimson. His eyes flashed sombre fire and his mouth curled in scathing irony. To Emilie he seemed endued with a Satanic beauty, as he stood thus casting off as a useless burden all that was human in his heart and boldly glorifying deeds which should have made his conscience rebel.

“ Then you fight against him ? ” she asked.

“ Yes ! ” he cried, violently.

“ Then, Thauziat, you will be vanquished. For he will have to save him that which will have been your destruction—a woman’s love.”

“ We shall see.”

Still Emilie did not regard herself as beaten, and, having failed in her endeavours with Hélène and with Thauziat, she turned to Louis.

“ You know,” she said to him, “ that I am not a woman to be frightened at nothing, but the way you are going on simply terrifies me. You are walking with no balancing-pole upon a golden wire. You will fall and break your neck.”

“ Oh, no,” he replied, gaily ; “ I do not risk anything now. I expect everything from the big affair your father is going to bring off, and that must be safe, for surely you would not go so far as to think he would make it come to nothing simply to serve me a bad turn.”

“ I don't know anything about it, and I am not trying to find out what is possible and what is not, but I do entreat you to confine yourself to the industrial part of the business. Don't speculate on a rise of the shares. Who knows what may happen ? ”

“ Well, I know that a banker would never amuse himself by ruining a rival, an adversary, an enemy if you like, if it meant his own ruin at the same time. Your father has an enormous amount of money in this cable scheme.”

“ Can one ever tell what he has or what he has not ? Anyway he has an immense amount of power and he hates you cordially, so be on your guard.”

“ Thanks ; but don't worry yourself about me, there is no cause for fear.”

There did indeed seem nothing to fear. The bill for the laying of the cable passed through the *Chambre* without the slightest opposition, and Louis was now only awaiting the Senate's vote to buy up all the shares he could and thus amass in a few days the capital of which he stood in such pressing need. He had been able to put off with a little ready money the contractors who were building the mansions in the *Champs-Élysées* quarter, and the houses were slowly rising, storey by storey.

Sir James, who had acquired a sudden passion for stone in its rough state and now passed all his time in stone-yards, was continually worrying *Hérault*, whom he called “ my partner,” with demands for money for building purposes. The extraordinary baronet might be seen mounting ladders and seating himself on scaffoldings to talk to the foremen, and he subordinated everything else to the completion of Diana's houses. He forgot curiosity sales, and

the Hôtel Drouot, for in his eyes now the immense blocks of stone were things much more precious, much more important than *pâte-tendre* Sèvres or Japanese carved ivory. In his irritation—for he could not meet the requirements of his own builders—Louis constantly met Sir James' demands with abrupt refusals, but he never succeeded in wearying or offending Diana's husband, who after a scene of the kind only assumed the air of a man who finds his confidence misplaced, and merely passed whole evenings without uttering a word. This would, on the whole, have been something to be thankful for had not Lady Olifaunt taken up the cudgels in Sir James' defence and worried Louis with tender reproaches.

One evening, tired of this squabbling and wishing to reassure Sir James and his wife, who seemed to have doubts about him, he was imprudent enough to explain to Sir James the plan he had based upon the issuing of the cable shares. Diana expressed her approval and her husband blindly followed suit, but by an unhappy fate the next day, as the Englishman was crossing the Champs-Élysées on his way to the stone-yard, he met Lereboulley. He had already several times expressed his regret to the senator at no longer seeing him at the Avenue Gabriel, and Lereboulley had replied with some bitterness, that as Lady Olifaunt no longer honoured him with her trust, he was too deeply hurt to visit her. Now, whenever the two men met, the one spoke of Diana and the other of the progress of the buildings, so forming an odd duologue at the conclusion of which they were both agreed that Louis Hérault had not sufficient wealth at his back to finish the erection of the houses, but that Diana ran no risk as the ground was hers.

On this particular day Lereboulley commenced to speak about the building of his own accord, and Sir James at once launched out into a lot of technical explanations about the state of advancement the houses had reached.

"Yes, but how about the payments?" said the senator. "How are they getting on?"

"Monsieur Hérault will settle all the accounts very shortly. He is about to commence an operation from which he expects great results."

"Ah?" said Lereboulley, pricking up his ears, for he had noticed with annoyance that for the last few weeks Louis had given up speculating.

"Yes. He is only waiting for the issuing of the cable shares."

"He is very sensible," answered the senator, while his voice trembled, he was so agitated. "It will be a good speculation," and pressing Sir James' hand, he hurried away in the direction of the boulevards.

Thus, he had been informed of Louis' projects by the indiscretion of the very man who had so great an interest in their success, and as he walked he pondered deeply. His enemy would soon be at his mercy, for though he did not yet know exactly how he would strike the blow, yet that it should be struck he was fully determined. This would be the last engagement of the war that was being waged, and must be decisive. The following day Lereboulley was to speak in the Senate to ask for a vote in accordance with that which the Chamber had already given, but for a moment he thought of putting off the conclusion of the subject by asking for the reading of the Bill to be deferred for a month. Thus he would be prolonging Louis' finan-

cial embarrassment, and there would be the chance of seeing him succumb beneath the burden he had taken upon his shoulders. But this result, obtained by a waste of time and indirect means, did not seem to the senator a sufficiently crushing punishment. He wished to deal a quick straight blow which would lay his victim helpless at his feet. He longed so intensely for the pleasure of gloating over his rival's agony that he had not enough patience to wait any longer, and in his inventive mind another plan began to evolve itself—a plan simple of execution, terrible if it succeeded. And it was impossible for it to be anything but successful. The senator went into the Stock Exchange, talked for a few moments with some brokers, then went to his offices.

If the zeal with which Lerehoulley was preparing the *dénouement* of the crisis was great, the anxiety with which Louis awaited it was greater still. He was staking his all upon a single card. If he won, he would be well afloat again and had nothing further to fear. If he lost, he would sink to the bottom like a stone, without the slightest hope of rescue. Of all his wealth, there only now remained the little belonging to his grandmother, the estate at Boissise, which cost money instead of bringing any in, and the money which had been settled on Hélène, and which was to go to the child. But he did not hesitate about playing the card, for he was involved to such a degree that he could not possibly get out of his difficulties any other way. If he ceased to pay the builders when their work was half-finished, he would see the houses, which had cost so dear, sold for next to nothing, and all he had placed in the enterprise would be lost. If he

risked the speculation he might be successful, and all would be saved.

The afternoon the question was to be opened before the Senate Louis was at Lady Olifaunt's house. They were talking business, for when the fascinating Diana was not resting her eyes and refreshing her complexion by slumber, she was always ready to employ her thoughts on serious matters. Suddenly Sir James rushed into his wife's room without even sending in first to say he was at home—a sign with him of immense excitement—crying :

“The Senate has voted. Lereboulley was simply wonderful !”

“Were you at the debate, then ?”

“Yes, I had an opportunity of being present, so, as I was interested, I gave up the houses for a day. Lereboulley's speech has made quite a sensation. He has made the Government grant a subsidy to the company, and he received a tremendous amount of applause for his patriotic sentiments. His success pleased me intensely—”

He stopped abruptly, perceiving that his praise of Lereboulley had caused a constrained silence, but he was not a man to waive any of his opinions merely to be agreeable to his wife's friends, and with a surly look he withdrew. Then Diana rose from the couch on which she had been lying, and putting her arms round Louis' neck—

“Then it is quite decided ? We risk the speculation ?”

“Yes.”

“And when will it come off ?”

“As soon as the shares make the slightest movement upwards.”

They remained together an hour, and whoever had seen

them in their youth and beauty, pressed close to one another, hand in hand, eyes looking into eyes, would have said—"Those two worship each other, and can talk of nothing but their love." But if the same spectator had listened, the words, "brokerage," "premium," "carrying over," would have fallen on his ear, for these lovers were talking like two stockbrokers, and their one thought was not how best to prove their love, but how to make money. And it was for this that Louis had been false to H  l  ne !

At the end of the week great yellow bills placarded all over Paris announced the issuing of the shares of the submarine cable, and the financial journals tried to outdo each other in extolling the enterprise. The press spoke well of it, and everyone said—"It is not in the hands of ordinary company-promoters, but of good, sound business men, and Lereboulley's name is guarantee enough for the public."

During that week Louis was feverishly nervous and anxious. He either spoke with great volubility or was profoundly silent, absorbed in serious calculations. One morning, without any previous intimation of his determination, he told his grandmother and his wife at lunch that he was going to England, and he started that very evening, having first begged his family not to reveal his destination to anyone whatever. The reason for his journey was very simple. As he did not dare give all his commissions to the Paris brokers for fear of calling attention to his project, and did not wish to telegraph to London, he determined to go thither himself. According to his theory, English speculators would quickly seize on the stock and send it up, and he intended to aid their intention with his own bold plunge.

He had been gone four days when Emilie, looking in the evening paper for the account of an exhibition of paintings, came upon the following paragraph :—

“ It is stated upon good authority that a company now being promoted, and at the head of which is to be placed one of our greatest men in financial and political circles, is the object of such important manœuvring on the part of a few English speculators, that the members of the Chamber intend to obtain the withdrawal of the subsidy granted by the State. France, who has been already sufficiently duped at Suez, is not rich enough to subsidise enterprises destined to enrich capitalists on the other side of the Channel.”

And two lines lower—

“ It is announced that Monsieur Lereboulley is about to leave for Rome. The great financier goes to arrange the conditions with the Italian Government of a loan necessitated by the extension of that country’s colonial policy.”

It was all quite clear. By means of the first paragraph the confidence of shareholders in the prosperity of the cable company—for that was the one that was undoubtedly in question—was to be shaken ; and, in the second, proof was given that Lereboulley had abandoned all interest in the affair, since he chose the very hour of the allotment of the shares to go to Italy. .

Dismayed and startled, Emilie sought the money article, and the words that first attracted her attention, as if they had been printed in glittering letters, were—“ Fall of a Hundred Francs in Submarine Cable Shares.” In a second, as by a strange intuition, she felt sure that Louis had speculated on the rise of the new stock, and that the fall—of which she saw at once the cause and effect—was intended

to ruin him. She hastened to her father's study, determined to question and entreat him and to make use of the decided influence she possessed over him. But she could not find him—he had gone out, and would not be in to dinner.

Then she ordered her carriage, and drove to the Héraults'. There they were in ignorance of everything. They had only received a letter from Louis containing good news, and announcing his return for the morrow. Mademoiselle Lereboulley would not risk frightening Hélène for nothing by leading her to fear a catastrophe she could not ward off, so she controlled herself and went away without revealing anything.

The next morning she went to her father's room, where she found the senator just shaved and seated at a little table (on which was laid a breakfast service in silver-gilt) drinking a cup of tea before going to Rue Le Peletier. As his daughter entered the room he rose, and his plump face brightened.

"What, is it you?" he exclaimed, drawing her to him to kiss her. "What has happened? You do not generally assist at my *petit lever*."

Any other morning Emilie would have put on her quizzing air, and replied—"Oh, but, papa, you know your *petit lever* does not often take place at home!" But to-day she was in no mood for jesting, and going straight to the subject of her trouble, she replied—

"What has happened? That is what I want you to tell me. I see that the shares of the cable company, which should have been at a premium, have fallen a hundred francs. What does it mean?"

The senator quickly slipped off his dressing-gown and put on his coat. Then, turning to his daughter with a smile—

“What, are you actually asking me about Stock Exchange business? How can it possibly interest you, my dear child? Take my advice, dear, and confine yourself to domestic affairs; it will be much better for you.”

“But do tell me the reason of this unexpected drop.”

“Oh, it’s some syndicate bearing the shares, or something of that sort. Nothing of any importance.”

“And the articles in the papers in which it is given to understand that you have given up the whole affair?”

“Absurd rubbish, like most of the tales published in the papers. The truth will come to light, and the shares will go up to the price they ought to stand at.”

“But, in the meantime, the fall will have ruined some?”

“Ruined! Well, how can that be helped? It is the result of battles on the Stock Exchange, as wounds and death are the results of battles on the field. Woe to the vanquished! That is the order of the day in all warfare.”

Emilie drew near to her father, then said very gravely—

“Can you give me your word of honour that Louis Hérault is not among the vanquished?”

In a second an expression came over Lereboulley’s face which terrified his daughter, and with a roughness he had never used to her before, he cried—

“Ah, ah, little daughter, you must have good eyesight to see so clearly into what is going on! You are anxious about your friend, and you come to ask me for news of him? Well, then, he has been rash enough to attack me, and I have broken his back as I will do to all those who try to follow his example!”

“And his mother, his wife, his child?”

“It was his place to think of them, not mine.”

“Because he has behaved abominably, is that a reason why others should do the same?”

“My child, you forget to whom you are speaking.”

“Alas! I wish I could!”

At these words, so sadly uttered, Lereboulley turned pale for they wounded him deeply. Then drawing Emilie within his arms—

“Emilie, my child, let me beg of you not to take any part in this quarrel, and not to judge me by appearances. You know how I love you, and what you have just said has gone to my heart. Do not let anything rise between us—neither anger nor distrust. Keep out of all these intrigues, do not step into this mire; you will only defile yourself in vain. I am not bad-hearted, as you know, and I would not harm anyone in the world unless I had good reason for doing so. But this Louis has behaved in a shameful way to me; he has affronted and humiliated me, and has caused me one of the greatest sorrows which could befall me. He is unworthy of the interest you take in him. If you knew—but I can see that you do know, and that it is not for him but for his family you are pleading. Well, I will do whatever you like for them. They are old friends as I shall not forget, and I promise you I will raise them up another fortune. But as for him, he must feel my foot upon his neck. And he shall feel it—on that I will stake my reputation.”

He had taken his daughter on his knees and was kissing and caressing her, but she was coldly and lucidly calculating the weight of his words.

"But I am rich myself," she said, standing up. "I inherited a considerable amount from my mother. I am free and of age, and I can help Louis."

"Your help would be in vain," replied Lereboulley. "He is caught, and caught too securely to be freed. It is I who have sold all he has bought, and he must either pay or turn bankrupt."

"But where is he? What is he doing?" cried Emilie in despair. "If he should come to an extreme determination—if he should kill himself! What remorse would be ours!"

"He? Kill himself?" cried Lereboulley, with a burst of laughter. "Come, come! You ask where he is; can you not guess? When he returned from London yesterday he went straight to Lady Olifaunt's house, which he has not yet left. That is where he is."

Emilie's head drooped. Now she herself despaired of her cause.

"What can I do?" she murmured.

"Try to get him back to his own home, and to make him stay there in future."

But Emilie sighed, and went out of the room without kissing her father.

CHAPTER XI.

ON his return from London in a state of numb torpor such as no doubt annihilated Napoleon's moral strength when he arrived at the Elysée after the disastrous defeat at Waterloo, Louis found Lady Olifaunt quite calm and bearing the blow with a smiling philosophy which should have enlightened him as to her true sentiments, had he not been perfectly blind to her defects. Sir James also, as if he had received some secret consolation, displayed a very singular placidity, considering the anxiety he took in the interests of the honest masons who were labouring to erect in good hard stone a fortune for Diana.

Louis, who had expected to be met with transports of despair and bitter recrimination, soon became calm and collected again and able to study the situation. A heavy liquidation lay before him which could mean nothing short of ruin, but he might be able to preserve his honour intact. He was already aware that, with a little help and by making important reforms in his mode of life, he might again recover himself, but the very first reform must be with regard to Diana. Before everything else he must give up his libertine existence and resign himself to living a steady life.

Lying back in an arm-chair before the fire-place of the room which had been put ready for him at the Olifaunts', he went over again in his mind all the incidents of the year which had just passed away, and gradually he began to get

a true idea of his conduct. He saw the motives he had obeyed, and found them mean and dishonourable—a passion exclusively sensual, vanity carried to extremes; it was for those that he had dissipated his fortune and compromised the happiness of the beings nearest to him.

Suddenly those to whom he now acknowledged he had behaved so badly presented themselves to his mind. He saw them gathered together in the drawing-room of their home in the Faubourg Poissonière. His grandmother was silently knitting. Hélène, looking very pale, was holding little Pierre on her knees, and teaching him to talk. The child, standing in his mother's lap, was following on her lips the formation of the syllables, trying to repeat the words as they were uttered and laughing and clapping his little rosy hands. Louis fancied he could hear distinctly the two voices—that of his wife, sad and low, his son's soft and laughing, and both uttered but one word, always the same, as if they wished to endue it with the force and persistence of an appeal—

“Papa! Papa!”

He closed his eyes to shut out this picture which went to his heart, but the murmur of the two voices still sounded in his ears, and the gentle call became still more urgent, more loving and imploring. At last Hérault rose from his chair, and, as he looked around him, this room in this strange house became hateful to him. He reproached himself for having come to see his mistress instead of hastening to rejoin his wife, and, feeling as much disgust as if he had suddenly found himself in a place of ill-fame, he took his hat and went downstairs.

He found Lady Olifaunt in her dressing-room employed

in polishing her rosy nails with various instruments of ivory and steel. She motioned Louis to a chair, and, without interrupting her important occupation,

"Well," she said, "have you quite recovered yourself? You really made me quite uneasy yesterday evening, you were so discouraged."

"It was only natural that I should be," he replied with a slight smile.

"Have you made up your mind what to do?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Have I any choice? You cannot for a moment imagine that I shall take advantage of the non-recognition by the law of gambling debts. The first thing will be to pay all I owe, then I shall see what there is still left for me to do."

"I know you too well to have had any doubts as to your intentions, Louis dear, and it was not to your business affairs that I was alluding. I have no doubt they can be satisfactorily arranged, especially if you place yourself in the hands of a sharp man."

"Maître Talamon, my lawyer, is a young, pushing and clever fellow, and a true friend as well. I shall give him full power to act as he thinks best."

"That is all right. But all this must be very painful to you; you will be so much talked about."

"It will be a just punishment for my folly," he interrupted coldly.

Diana raised her eyes. The tone in which Louis had just spoken betokened a totally different course of ideas and sentiment to those which were usual to him.

“Sir James and I are going away for a few weeks,” she said. “Will you come with us?”

“It would be impossible,” he replied as coldly as before.

“Why?” asked Diana, drawing nearer to him, and bringing all the fascination of her blue eyes to bear upon him.

“Because my position is completely changed, and I must alter my habits in accordance with it.”

She threw a coaxing tenderness into her manner, she enveloped the young man with the intoxicating perfume which exhaled from her body, and laying her golden head caressingly upon his shoulder, she whispered in his ear—

“Do you not love me any longer? If you like we will go to Italy, to some blue lake, and there we shall forget all except each other as we lie amidst the roses, beneath the sun—”

“Impossible!” he repeated. And as she wound her arms still closer around him;

“We must say good-bye, Diana,” he said firmly.

She started from him, and watching him closely—

“Louis, what is the meaning of this? Whence come these new and sudden resolutions? What have you heard? What has happened? Is it thus you reward my devotion?”

“Such devotion, Diana, I ought no longer to accept. We are forced to part. If I did not speak frankly to you, as I am speaking, I should only be doing you a wrong. And I have wronged others enough already,” he added with a gesture of sorrow.

“Ah! what matter about others!” exclaimed Diana passionately. “Need we trouble about them?”

“Yes,” answered Louis, firmly; “we need and we must when I am about to ask of them the greatest sacrifices.”

Lady Olifaunt's face assumed a threatening and malicious expression.

"Of your grandmother, I suppose, and of your wife? Can you think of them when you are beside me?"

"Can you reproach me for doing so when they are so unhappy?"

He was forced to stop for he was choking with emotion. Then—

"You are well aware of all they have already suffered through me. All that they had left were the material pleasures of existence, and now, by my fault, they are about to be deprived of even those. If my presence can in any way lessen their grief, I ought not to refuse them that, at least. Diana," he went on in clearer tones, "I sacrificed my wife to you when she was rich and independent, and I behaved abominably in doing that, but if I did not go back to her now she is about to be poor and disdained, I should be the most cowardly and dishonourable of men. I unquestionably owe her that reparation and consolation."

The beautiful Englishwoman quivered as she listened, for she saw that Louis was escaping her toils to return to the woman she hated. The last blow she had dreamed of dealing her rival had woefully miscarried—instead of depriving her of her husband it was she herself who was losing her lover. It was a thought she could not tolerate, and with venomous irony she retorted—

"The reparation she may not perhaps be thankful for, and the consolation would certainly not be of any use. If that is all which restrains you, you can decide to come with me."

At these words Louis' face became livid, and seizing Lady Olifaunt by the wrist—

“What do you mean?” he cried.

“Only what everyone knows, you, naturally, excepted.”

“You lie!” And his grip upon her delicate arm tightened until she gave a cry of pain.

Crimson with anger, she snatched her wrist free from his grasp, and with the other hand struck him so fierce a blow that he reeled.

“If it is so difficult to convince you, I will show you her with her lover.”

“When?”

“This very evening.”

“If you are deceiving me, beware!” he exclaimed, with a gesture of terrible menace.

“And if I have spoken the truth?”

“Then I shall have nothing to keep me here, and I will follow you.”

He turned towards the door; he felt as though he were suffocating.

“Where are you going?” she asked, gently.

“To the club.”

“You will not stay with me?”

“No. Good-bye until this evening.”

When the door had closed behind him, Lady Olifaunt stood for a moment thinking, her hand to her forehead. Then a sardonic hiss came from between her teeth, and aloud, as if in reply to her own thoughts, she said—

“It will be enough for him to see them together. If he wishes for any explanations and allows his temper to rise, Thauziat will bring him down like a pigeon.”

She seated herself at her little Louis XV. *escritoire*, opened it, wrote two notes, then rang the bell.

"See that these letters are taken immediately to their addresses," she said to the maid who appeared, "and let me know if they have been given to the people to whom they are addressed."

At that moment Sir James came in. Lady Olifaunt rose, smoothed down the pleats of her dress, examined for a long time her fine, blue-veined forehead in the glass, smiled at her own reflection, then turning to her husband—

"What a long time it is since we saw Lereboulley! Perhaps I was not very amiable to him. You must call in at Rue Le Peletier and give him an invitation to dinner from me."

Sir James was delighted.

"At last you are becoming reasonable again," he said. "Poor fellow, he will be so pleased. I will go at once."

And having kissed his wife's hand, off he went.

The inmates of the Hérault mansion were at last beginning to feel great anxiety. For four days the life of Héléne and old Madame Hérault had been quiet and regular as usual. Louis was away, but he would return at the end of the week, and they tranquilly awaited his reappearance, for, alas! her husband's absence was no longer a cause of sadness to his young wife, for he was more apart from her when he was present in the house than he was at this moment when miles of sea and land lay between them. Emilie came to see them every day, and as time passed on, she asked so persistently if they had received any news of Louis, that Héléne began to feel uneasy, and at last questioned her friend.

But Mademoiselle Lereboulley at once beat a retreat, and no information was to be drawn from her. Still Hélène could no longer doubt that something was going on of which Emilie knew—it was only too plain. But what? Was Lady Olifaunt Louis' travelling companion? Had she made him give her a second edition in the Channel of the cruise she had gone with Lereboulley through the Mediterranean? Was her husband's absence—which he had told her would only last a few days—to be indefinitely prolonged? Had he promised never to return home? What was not to be feared from his weakness and Diana's wickedness?

But the terrible doubts which were torturing Hélène were suddenly dispelled, though the truth was so startling that perhaps it would have been better had she remained in ignorance of it.

One morning old Madame Hérault abruptly entered Hélène's room and dropped into an arm-chair. Her face betrayed extreme agitation, her hands trembled, and she had hurried upstairs so quickly that she could hardly draw her breath.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?" exclaimed Hélène, seized with a nameless fear.

The old lady gazed steadily at her daughter, as she called her, then asked in trembling tones:

"Do you not know?"

"Speak, speak! I implore you. You are killing me—"

"Well, my child, Louis has ruined us!"

Hélène breathed a sigh of relief. For a moment she had feared something worse.

"Maître Talamon, our lawyer, has just left. He hastened

here to inform me of some sales my grandson has lately effected, and to tell me of some fresh orders he has received by telegram. He thinks Louis must have gone mad, and he advises me to withdraw the power of attorney I gave him. What is the meaning of it all? Think as I will, I cannot understand it. Where has all this money gone to? Talamon, who serves us faithfully, has made inquiries, and he says that Louis has gone in for building to an enormous extent. But if that were true, how could we be ignorant of it? And anyway, he cannot have ruined himself by building. Houses don't fly away, and they would always be worth the money expended on them. There is evidently something else."

The old lady was talking in her little, sharp voice with feverish volubility. Her grey hair, escaped from beneath her cap, had come out of curl, and was hanging down in straight locks, and she, so neat and precise as a rule, had let her lawyer see her in this disorder, and had come up to Hélène in the same state, so great was her anxiety.

"If he had spent so much before, when he was a bachelor, I should have understood where the money had gone to. But now he is reformed, he is married and a father. Haven't you really noticed anything?"

"Nothing."

"Does your husband hide things from you, then?"

"He has managed to do so from you pretty well."

"That's true. I don't know what I am saying, my dear. I have completely lost my head."

She rose from her seat, and excitedly began to pace the room. As she passed a mirror she caught sight of herself, and was horror-stricken.

“Good gracious ! what a state I am in !” she exclaimed, and setting her cap straight, she hurried downstairs to her own room.

In the afternoon Emilie came in. It was that very morning that she had tried to make her father rescue Louis from his terrible position, and her nerves were still unstrung. She did not inquire after Hérault, for now she was sure of what she had wanted to know, and old Madame Hérault was quick enough to notice the omission.

“How is it you do not ask if we have heard from Louis ?” she suddenly inquired.

“Ah, yes, I forgot,” answered Mademoiselle Lereboulley, without losing her self-possession. “Is he well ?”

“He is so well,” returned Madame Hérault, “that he is doing his best to squander all the money his father and his grandfather made. Did you not know ?”

“I heard he had done so yesterday. But I have foreseen a long while that he would do so.”

“Then you also know how and why he has rushed into such mad speculation ?”

Emilie bent her head to denote “yes.”

“Tell me all about it, my child, for it is a mystery to me. What folly or what vice has brought him to such a distressing position ? Speak, I wish to know all.”

Hélène started from her seat as though to place herself between Madame Hérault and Mademoiselle Lereboulley. Her pride rebelled at the idea of the former learning her grandson’s faults and regarding him with contempt. He was her—Hélène’s—husband, the other half of herself, and to her it seemed as though some of the blame and scorn he would receive must be reflected upon her. She made a

movement by which she asked Emilie to say nothing. But the grandmother saw the gesture, and, turning towards her, said sternly :

“ You wish to prolong my ignorance ? Why ? Are you partly responsible for the misfortune which has befallen us ? Have you as well as your husband deceived me ? Are you his accomplice in wickedness ? Are you also guilty ? ”

At these words, which were at once so cruel and so unjust, Hélène uttered a cry, and addressing herself to Emilie, as though she was calling her to witness,

“ I ? I ? ” she cried.

Old Madame Hérault drew herself up until her stooping body was erect, her features assumed a sudden expression of energy and grandeur, and to her grandson's wife she said—

“ Then, if I accuse you wrongfully, justify yourself. I am your mother, I have the right to know the truth, and it is your duty to reveal it to me.”

“ No ! What you are demanding from her is beyond her strength,” exclaimed Emilie. “ You shall hear from my lips that which she has so proudly and so generously hidden from you.”

And disregarding Hélène's entreaties, Mademoiselle Lereboulley commenced the narrative of the martyrdom which for a year had been borne by the young wife without a murmur in her tender anxiety to spare the grandmother the knowledge of the follies of the grandson she so dearly loved. She told all—the betrayal, the insolent abandon, the abasement of the wife before the mistress, and as she described the sorrows so bravely endured, the insults so meekly submitted to, she contrasted the cynicism and the treachery which had been displayed on the one side with

the patience and the gentleness on the other. She revealed the infamous Diana in her true character, with her reputation stained and besmirched, and Hélène she depicted as she was—proud, brave, angelic, and thus at once avenged her for all her suffering.

Stupefied, the grandmother listened to this startling revelation without uttering a word. Accustomed as she had been for sixty years to consider all those who had in succession borne the name of Hérault—her husband, her son, and her grandson—as beings of a superior clay to whom ought to be rendered obedience and respect, what she now heard came as a terrible blow to her, beneath which all her trust and affection quivered. To her it seemed as though there was nothing stable or fixed left upon the earth ; her fortune was crumbling away, her honour was threatened, her happiness destroyed. Like a shipwrecked sailor overwhelmed by the storm, she cast a terrified glance around her and saw only Hélène, grave, but calm and resolute. Then the old grandmother approached the young woman, and bowing her white head—

“ My child,” she said, “ I have misjudged you. I have accused you when all the sorrow you so courageously bear has been brought upon you by me. I meant to bestow wealth and happiness upon you, and now you are poor and miserable. I ask your pardon.”

She held out her arms, and, with an exclamation of affection, Hélène threw herself into them.

“ I hoped to have done so much for you, and it is to you that I shall have to look for everything, for you will help me to bear, with your sympathy and affection, the terrible grief which will shadow my last days. If we are together we

shall have more strength to endure the sorrow with which this wicked boy has envenomed our lives."

She could not continue, for H  l  ne had gently placed her hand upon her mouth.

"Do not be too hard," she said, entreatingly, "and do not believe that Louis is completely lost. We will bring him back to reason, we will restore quiet and wisdom to his mind. Even in the darkest hours I have never lost faith in him. He has caused me cruel anguish, but I love him, and love cannot exist without hope. He has committed faults, he has been foolish, but if we forget the faults their traces will disappear; and as for the follies, we will help him to repair the mischief they have wrought. We have a right to be indulgent since he is your son and my husband, and women, you know, have been given to men by God to cherish, pity, and console them."

"Ah, my daughter, you are an angel from heaven!" exclaimed Madame H  rault, unable to restrain her tears. "And you have inspired me with a little confidence. But where is Louis? What can he be doing? He should be back by now."

"Perhaps he suspects that we have learnt what has happened and does not dare come here. But do not worry. We shall soon have reliable news of him."

"And the money troubles in which he is involved, how can we rescue him from them?"

"We must give up all you possess and all he settled on me when I married him. But we must try to save the factory, which has been the source of your former wealth, and which may be the means by which we shall acquire another fortune."

The old lady threw up her hands in wondering admiration.

“What a wonderful woman you are!” she exclaimed. “But how shall we attain that end?”

Hélène smiled, and with a firm, deeply-rooted conviction, she replied—

“By our will.”

Then in a low voice she began to make plans for the construction, on the ruins of the edifice destroyed by Louis, of another more solid and more lasting erection. In the midst of her anguish she was already dreaming of future efforts, and thus displaying her mind in all its marvellous energy. She soothed old Madame Hérault's fears, she astonished Emilie, energetic as was the latter herself, and, giving way to the beguiling projects she was forming for the future, she even turned her own thoughts from the terrible realities of the present.

About four o'clock Emilie went away, promising, however, to return in the evening, and Hélène was left alone. Night was drawing on, and with the increasing darkness the young wife's thoughts became gloomier also. The arguments with which she had reassured Madame Hérault did not seem trustworthy to herself. She upbraided herself with obstinately closing her eyes to the danger which surrounded her, and all that there was to render her position uncertain and unsafe appeared to her in the darkest colours.

Her husband's unexplained stay away from home and the absence of all news were signs calculated to frighten her. What was he doing? Where was he? In the discouragement to which, knowing as she did the weakness of

Louis' character, she was sure he would give way, what follies or violence might he not have been led to commit ! As she pondered, this brave resolute woman felt her moral strength forsaking her. She saw around her nothing but darkness and silence. A deadly chill seemed to strike to her very soul, she was filled with an awful nervous dread, and, with palpitating heart, almost ready to shriek for help under the intuitive consciousness of some unknown danger, she rose to go into her bedroom, unable to stay alone any longer in this room which seemed gloomy as a tomb.

She was quickly restored to herself by the opening of the door to admit her maid with a lamp, the light of which soon dispelled the dismal thoughts darkness had brought in its wake. For a few seconds *Hélène* was dazzled by the sudden brightness and could see nothing, then she distinguished a letter lying on a silver tray before her. She seized it eagerly and scanned the handwriting, but it was not Louis', and she sadly let the envelope drop again upon the table. Then she resumed her seat, feeling more unhappy in this bright light than she had felt when she was surrounded by shadows, and listlessly she opened the letter and began to read.

Suddenly her cheeks flushed crimson, and she uttered an exclamation of amazement. As if dazzled by what she saw before her, she passed her hand over her eyes, then again taking up the letter she read—

“Your husband, whom you believe to be at London, has been in Paris since yesterday. He leaves to-morrow for Italy with someone whose name it is needless to mention. If you wish to see him, you will find him at Monsieur de Thauziat's house, where he is in hiding.”

The paper slipped from her hands, and, stunned by the tumult of the thoughts which were rushing through her brain, she stood motionless in the middle of the room, all physical strength gone, but with her reasoning powers becoming every moment brighter and clearer.

Her first impression was that all was lost, that this time the edifice she had raised with so much care upon the ruins of her life was being destroyed by the irresistible blows dealt by hatred, and that Louis was being triumphantly borne away from her by her enemy. But her courage was never long cast down, and hardly had she seen, in a horrible, mental vision, her husband, the father of her child, forsaking her at the time when his presence in his home was imperatively commanded by every dictate of honour, than she was seeking the means of holding back the fugitive. A tempest of rage, which she made no effort to control, urged her to cry aloud in the silence and solitude of her deserted nuptial chamber, and a blood-red mist swam before her eyes as she thought of going to kill her rival. What ! Was not her misery yet abject enough ? Must she, then, be left for ever alone in life, must her son be as an orphan, while this woman insolently paraded in her train this husband torn from his own fireside, this father stolen from the sympathy and affection of his family !

“ I would rather see him dead,” she said aloud. But the terrible words made her shudder, and she continued—“ No ! I shall be able to win him from her ! ” And her blood, which had been for an instant frozen, again coursed through her veins, increasing the violence of her thoughts by its impetuous current, and she thought herself strong enough to attempt all and to succeed in all. She was consumed

by a burning fever, and, unable to remain still, she began to pace the room, while every now and then some disconnected phrase issued from her lips.

The project which the letter, diabolical in its design, was of necessity bound to suggest to her, took form in her mind—she would go and seek her husband. Before all she wished to prevent his departure. She knew what power she could assert over him if she determined to speak to him boldly; she remembered seeing him weeping at her feet, weak and trembling. She would go to him, and once she had found him he would be forced to follow her, even had she to cover him with shame to overcome his resistance. In her excitement she felt endued with herculean strength—a strength which would enable her to bear him away in her arms if needs were.

But her reason soaring above her anger, like an eagle above the storm-clouds, put a stop to her extreme and improbable suppositions. Whither must she go to find her husband? “To Monsieur de Thauziat’s house,” answered the letter. Thauziat! A suspicion entered her mind. If it should be a snare that had been set for her? If the man who still loved her had connived with Diana to imagine this means for drawing her to his house?

She picked up the letter again, and carefully examined the writing, but the characters were quite strange to her. Lady Olifaunt had disguised her caligraphy with such marvellous skill as to deceive even *Hélène’s* penetrating eyes. What friend or what enemy could have sent the anonymous communication? For a moment the young wife thought of consulting *Emilie*, but she recollected that *Mademoiselle Lereboulley* had already cheated her once

and assisted Louis to escape, and she might again—of course from motives of affection, to avoid any violent scenes or to prevent a scandal—foil her in the execution of her plan. It was not utterly out of the question for her to go to Thauziat's house alone. If Louis were there what danger would she be running? And if Louis were not there, did she fear Thauziat? Even at the thought her lips curled in a disdainful smile. Besides, ought she to hesitate so long when her future happiness was in peril? Was it not cowardly to weigh so carefully every chance? She would be able to surmount any obstacle which might present itself, for never yet had she been vanquished save by those she loved, and because her own heart was their accomplice and a traitor to herself. Now she was fighting in defence of her love, who would be strong enough to prevent her gaining the victory?

All hesitation cast aside, with a smiling face she ordered her carriage, for she did not wish her visit to Thauziat to be in any way clandestine. She intended to present herself with head erect and unveiled face, and, having thrown a cloak around her, she hastily put on her bonnet and drove off.

Diana had made every calculation when she sent her letters. Clément hardly ever went out before two o'clock, and Hélène, since her husband's departure, never left the Hérault mansion, therefore they would both receive the notes in plenty of time to act upon them.

Seated in a large arm-chair in a room hung with old Genoa velvet with green flowers upon a silvery ground, furnished with costly Renaissance table and coffer, and lighted by softly-coloured windows, Thauziat was meditating

in the twilight. His face was intensely sad, and his eyelids drooped as though he were asleep. Diana had asked him not to leave the house, but to wait, and he was doing so. What he was awaiting he did not know, though an inward instinct told him it was something in connection with *Hélène* and *Louis*.

Gradually his thoughts had carried him into a world of dreams where the altered reality gave him an impression of perfect happiness. His eyes no longer saw his actual surroundings. The severe and somewhat gloomy study where he had passed so many lonely evenings pondering over his disappointment, was changed into a light and sunny room in which he could perceive the graceful outline of a woman's form. As she moved, light as an ethereal creation, she brought with her joy in the folds of her dress, and everything was illumined with the radiance of her beauty. She came nearer, nearer, until he could distinguish her features : they were *Hélène's*. With throbbing heart *Thauziat* followed her with his eyes, and no longer did her face betray severity, while her glance was full of gentleness, confidence, and affection. Her heart had been so cruelly tortured that from its wounds all her love for *Louis* had flowed forth. She had seen that she had taken a wrong path and had resolutely turned back. Awaiting her she had found him who so faithfully adored her, and life had begun again for her sweet, calm, and happy.

Soothed by the fascinating vision, *Clément* remained still, passionately clinging to this deception which gave him all the delights he so ardently coveted. The deep bell of the clock striking in the silence aroused him from his ecstasy. He counted the strokes—it was four o'clock—

then rose with a sigh. The room was filled with shadows, and outside there was a semi-obscurity only relieved by the pallid light of the gas lamps. He stood at the window absorbed in watching the passers-by hurrying along the pavement. He felt nervous and uneasy, as if some event of grave importance were about to happen, and he awaited, in an agitation he could not subdue and for which he could not account, the mysterious message or messenger which he felt sure would come.

Just as the clock struck five a brougham stopped at the door, and at the carriage window appeared the head of a woman, indistinguishable in the darkness, giving some order to the footman, who at once moved away. Thauziat's breath came quick and short. "It is she! Your dream is about to become a reality!" cried an inward voice, and his brain seemed on fire. He listened intently. The door-bell rang, its vibration seeming to find an echo in his very heart, there was a soft sound of footsteps, then the study-door opened, and a servant came in. Thauziat was so agitated that he could not trust himself to speak. A thrill passed through him, and his legs trembled under him. He was impatient to know, and yet he was afraid to ask.

"Madame Hérault wishes to know if Monsieur is at home, and can see her," said the servant, in calm impassive tones.

Thauziat's eyes flashed: it was really she! He made an affirmative motion with his head, then, raising a velvet *portière*, passed into the drawing-room, where two lamps were burning on the mantelpiece, and waited in an agony of impatience, joy, and anxiety.

A rustle of silk, a firm step, the sound of a door gently

opened, and at once closed again, and Hélène looking a little pale, and Clément grave and attentive, were alone together. He offered her a chair, but, refusing to be seated, she said in resolute tones—

“I have learned that my husband is at your house, sir. Will you kindly tell him I am here?”

Thauziat looked surprised, and without moving from his place he said very gently, for he feared to frighten her—

“Your husband, madame! It is just a week since I have seen him, and I do not even know if he is in Paris, but, in any case, I can assure you he is not in my house.”

She looked at him haughtily.

“Who is deceiving me? My unknown correspondent or you?”

“I!” he cried, with an accent of sincerity it was impossible to doubt. “I deceive you! What interest should I have in doing so?”

And as she did not reply—

“Regard this as your own house, madame,” he went on respectfully but firmly. “Ring, summon hither all those who live around me here, and question them. Perhaps you will put more faith in my servants’ words than you do in mine.”

She fell into the seat he had drawn forward for her and said in a choking voice—

“Forgive me! I am so unhappy.”

He bent as though he would prostrate himself at her feet, but she prevented him by a gesture, and controlling herself by an effort—

“Tell me the whole truth,” she said. “I do not know what is being planned around me, but I feel I am being

urged, in spite of my resistance, towards an abyss. Perhaps I only need a word of sincere advice, of loyal warning, to enable me to avoid the peril. Help me, enlighten me, I implore you."

But Thauziat shook his head as he replied bitterly—

"Is it my place to help you against him who ought to be your protector? What part are you asking me to play?"

"A part I have judged you capable of sustaining—that of a man generous enough to forget his rancour and his wrongs."

"Do not hold me in such high esteem," he answered. "I have suffered much and thought deeply, and I have lost all illusions about myself. If you have counted on any romantic abnegation on my part, cherish the hope no longer. I have had enough unhappiness of my own, I will not endure more torture for the sake of others."

For a moment she was daunted, but, throwing off the impression, she put on a smiling countenance and retorted—

"Do not calumniate yourself! I am sure you would make any sacrifice to spare me sorrow."

He gazed ardently upon her.

"Ah, how well you know your power over me!" he exclaimed passionately. "Yes, I love you so that I would give my life to see you smile upon me."

She moved as though to rise when she heard him speak thus, but she had determined to force him to tell her what she wished to know, so she only tried to stop his outburst and to make him cold again as when she entered the room.

"I am not asking for your life," she returned lightly.

"I am only asking you to tell me where my husband is."

"Where can he be if not at Lady Olifaunt's—"

She turned pale and her mouth twitched nervously. But she did not despond.

“Then send for him.”

“Of what use would that be?”

“It would prove, at any rate, that you were anxious to please me.”

She uttered the words with a coaxing grace, for she wanted to exert a fascination over Clément to make him bring Louis to her. Then, as he made no answer, she smiled at him, and joining her hands as if in entreaty—

“Shall I address myself to you in vain?”

He left the mantelpiece on which he had been leaning to draw nearer to her, and in icy tones—

“Do not attempt any longer, madame, to make me your dupe. In your wish to make me the connecting link between your husband and yourself, you are displaying a coquetry which is distasteful to yourself and exceedingly painful to me, but I think the means you are using to gain your ends beneath us both.”

Hélène felt pained and ashamed of herself, for Thauziat had indeed unmasked her in these words. By thus speculating on the passion of this man who adored her, had she not acknowledged and almost authorised it? She breathed a sigh and murmured softly—

“Ah, what hope is there left me now?”

“The hope that I shall tell you the truth, however abominable it may be. Oh, stay!” he exclaimed, as he saw her rise in terror. “Just now you asked me what it was, and now are you afraid to hear it?”

“No,” she said, proudly raising her head. “Speak, I am listening to you.”

“In the first place, how did you learn that you would find your husband at my house?”

“By means of an anonymous letter. And there was added, ‘He leaves to-morrow with someone whose name it is needless to mention.’”

“Just so. At the same time you received this warning, I received a note advising me not to go out to-day.”

“Then it was a trap?” asked Hélène, glancing at Thauziat distrustfully.

“Laid for you and me.”

“But by whom?”

“By whom? Who else would have laid it but the woman to whose interest it is, and whose pleasure it would be to ruin you?”

“Lady Olifaunt?”

“Yes, Lady Olifaunt.”

Then in a stifled voice he added—

“And who knows? Perhaps another—”

Hélène’s eyes dilated, and quivering with anguish—

“Whom else do you suspect?” she asked. “Whose name is it you dare not mention? Is the accusation then so very terrible a one that you hesitate to make it? Whom do you mean?”

He bowed his head as though he were ashamed of what he was about to say, then he whispered two words—

“Your husband!”

She was frozen with horror. This awful suspicion had entered her mind, and for an instant she doubted the man to whom she was bound by the indissoluble chains of love and honour. Her sad experience whispered to her, “He has abjured and sacrificed all for this shameless woman,

why should he not carry his infamy so far as to attempt to free himself from you by trying to catch you in an odious snare?" But to this whisper she listened with a shudder of disgust. In her heart another voice spoke firm and strong: "Do not allow yourself to give way, do not believe in such a crime, hope always, and you will triumph over everything. Louis will be neither cowardly nor dishonourable if you do not forsake him; he will be upright and good. But you must be determined."

"This accusation is senseless," she said aloud, as though in answer to her thoughts.

"Unfortunately it is but too probable," returned Thauziat, with increasing excitement. "If your husband has yielded to Lady Olifaunt's persuasions and decided to follow her, it was in his power to make his departure less blameworthy in the eyes of the world by letting it appear that your misconduct was his excuse. You cannot imagine what a man of his nature can become in the hands of a woman like Diana. She has deprived him of his reason, she is depriving him of his fortune, and she will deprive him of his honour. He has forsaken you for her, he will deliver you up to her hatred. Degraded as she is herself, she longs to degrade you also; what happiness for her to make you appear as vile as she is! Her aim is to bespatter you with the mire in which her life is passed, and he is her accomplice in the detestable work. He leaves his wife, the mother of his son, defenceless against the ferocious insults of his mistress. You know very well that all that I am saying is true; your heart has been already rent by the talons of this horrible woman, you have already been compelled to efface the traces of her foul attacks. Nothing is supposition, all is clear, proved,

certain, and the infamous past is the guarantee of an ignominious future !”

As he spoke he had drawn nearer to her, and now his tall figure towered above her, while his face was resplendent with a terrible beauty.

The words he had just uttered had overwhelmed Hélène, and she gazed at him in bewilderment, feeling frightened and fascinated at the same time. How was she to know the real workings of his gloomy mind ? At what was he aiming ? What hopes had he based on the misfortune which had overtaken her ? He had too much self-control to have descended to making an accusation against Louis simply to give himself the pleasure of seeing his rival lowered in her esteem, then what bold project had he formed, and what revenge did he desire for his past defeat ?

She fancied that on what he would say next depended the irremediable downfall of her plans or their possible success. The uncertainty was intolerable to her ; she wished to know at once what he was still withholding, and she said boldly—

“ What is your object in saying all this ? ”

“ To prove to you that fate did not heedlessly place me on your path, and that if I have already suffered so much for love of you, perhaps it has only been to make you the better appreciate my constancy. The baseness of your enemies has made us the joint victims of an odious plot. They have cast a doubt upon your honour and on mine, but I take up and accept their challenge. Attacked through my love I will proclaim aloud my right to that love. If, after affronting you in the grossest way, your

husband deserts you, you can again become free. Cast him from your life as he has cast you from his ; retrace your steps and efface from your memory the last two years. I offer you my hand, place yours within it. Never will a woman have been adored as you will be, for I will pass my whole existence in making you forget the sorrows you have endured."

She looked at him for a moment, then said slowly and distinctly—

"In other words, you are offering me the chance of recommencing my life as your wife after I have obtained a divorce?"

"Yes."

"If my husband forsakes me, still I shall not be free," she said gently. "I shall still have my child who will not betray the affection I bestow upon him and with which my life will be amply filled."

Thauziat extended his hand in a gesture of protection—

"He shall be my son," he answered. "I will love him as if it were my own blood that flowed in his veins, and I promise you to make an honest, honourable man of him."

"I am capable of doing that myself if his father fails in his duty, for by devoting myself to him alone I shall be setting him the example of fidelity and courage. And when he has seen me constantly living the life of a good mother and a loyal wife, he will need no one's help to become an upright man."

"I own you will have admirably performed your duty, but you will have lived but to sacrifice yourself, and you will not have known one day's absolute, complete happiness. You will have loved, but your love will not have been returned to you. You will never have experienced

the delights which result from the exquisite accord of two hearts which are so in unison that all their aspirations, joys, and transports, are intermingled. And you are in the glory of your youth and beauty, and years must pass before you attain the age when the passions are dead. Can you assert that your heart, which has been so cruelly wounded, is dead for ever? Are you sure you will never feel regret? Ah, if you would confide yourself to my care and allow me to watch over your future, I could promise to make you take pleasure in your existence. I should have but one aim in this world—to assure your happiness. I have never loved any woman but you, and for two years I have lived with your image in my heart, suffering with and for you, and having but one joy in life—that of seeing you, of being near you, of listening to the sound of your voice, even when that voice only conveyed cruel or indifferent words to my ears. Oh, how I have cursed fate and envied that happy and undeserving man who found the way to your heart, but who has not appreciated the treasures of your beauty and your goodness! I have envied him, and now that I see you clinging to him in spite of all, I hate him. Yes, I hate him with all the strength of my being! Hélène, do not persist in your folly. If you have no pity for yourself, take pity on the man who lives but for you, and who would sacrifice all without regret, to obtain from your eyes a look less cold, from your mouth a word more merciful.”

He was close beside her, his hands pleadingly extended, his face drawn by the violence of his feelings. He longed for her with an ardour which gleamed in his eyes, which burnt on his lips, and which surrounded her with a subtle but consuming flame. For the first time, she felt frightened

when she saw him thus excited to the point of madness, and she rose to her feet. But he seized the hem of her dress, and kneeling before her with his face buried in the material—

“Do not drive me to despair, I implore you!” he continued. “You have caused me so much pain, and I, in return, have given you nothing but my constant love. Think of how the man to whom you so sternly sacrifice me betrays you and deserts you, of how at this moment he is with that woman, perhaps in her arms—”

“Be silent,” she exclaimed. “It is infamous to say such things!”

“The infamy is in his behaviour towards you. He is about to run away with her—with her who is enriched by his ruin and yours—”

“You lie!”

And with a sudden movement she snatched her dress from Thauziat’s hands, and walking towards the door—

“I will listen to you no longer,” she cried.

He sprang to his feet, and barring her way—

“Ah! you are driving me to extremities! You *shall* stay!”

“Will you dare to keep me here against my will?”

“I will dare all.”

His face had become sombre and menacing. She drew back a pace, then said with insulting irony—

“Do you forget that, if you do not permit me to leave, I shall have just reason for thinking that it was you who laid the trap in which I have been caught?”

“Think so, if you choose.”

“You asked me for my love; is it my contempt that you desire?”

“ You held my honour in your hands ; it depended upon you whether I became good or bad, and you have made me wicked. Since a man must be criminal to find the way to your heart, I will be so.”

“ Beware ! If you approach me, I will shriek for help.”

“ You would be but the more surely ruined, and ruined, you are mine ! Besides, no one can come in ! ” he added, quickly shooting the bolt.

She ran to the window, but he was there as soon as she, and seized her in his arms. She felt herself pressed to his breast, she could hear the beating of his heart, then she pushed her hands against his shoulders with all her force, and, keeping herself at arm's length from him, struggled furiously to elude his embrace. She dared not scream, but she fought like a lioness. He—his eyes vacant, his breath coming in hurried gasps, half-mad with desire—was prepared for every violence.

Hélène was beginning to feel almost at the end of her strength, Clément's burning face was drawing nearer and nearer to her own when there came the sound of voices in the next room rising above the stifled noise of their fierce struggle.

“ Someone is coming,” panted Madame Hérault. “ There is yet time—let me go and I promise to forget all that has passed.”

Thauziat made no reply, but, lifting her up, tried to carry her out of the room. In the silence, there came a knock at the door—a loud, impatient knock. Hélène made a supreme effort, and writhing in the arms which were holding her, she slipped from them, found herself free and ran to the door, which she threw open with an exclamation

of triumph. But the cry died away on her lips, and she recoiled in terror—her husband was before her.

Pale and trembling she stood between the two men who were questioning each other with their eyes. Then forgetful of all else besides her honour, and more eager to clear herself than to quell the tempest she saw rising—

“Louis!” she exclaimed. “First of all, do you believe me guilty?”

She was superb in her outraged modesty, and, advancing towards her with outstretched hand—

“No!” he replied.

With a cry of relief, she threw her arms around him and pressed him to her as if he had given her fresh life. Then, turning with a terrible expression of scorn on her face towards Clément who stood perfectly impassive—

“Monsieur de Thauziat,” she said, “you have behaved towards a woman like a coward. You are not worthy a blow from the hand of a man.”

And, snatching from Louis one of the gloves he was twisting between his clenched fingers, she struck with it the face of the man who had insulted her.

With a stifled cry he started, and seemed about to fall on them and crush them both, then, with a tremendous effort, he regained his self-control and became calm once more, although his face was livid.

“You are right,” was all he said with a despairing smile, bowing before Madame Hérault.

“You will hear from me to-morrow,” said Louis.

“Yes, to-morrow,” repeated Thauziat, and his voice sounded like an echo in a vault.

Hélène, with a shudder, seized her husband by the arm and drew him away without once turning to look back.

CHAPTER XII.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, but so dark and foggy was the day that it was hardly light. In the little drawing-room on the second storey of the Hérault mansion (where they had gone to be as far away as possible from old Madame Hérault) Hélène and Emilie were waiting. Louis had been gone two hours, for his encounter with Thauziat was to take place at Bagatelle. The husband, to whom all the rights of the offended party had been allowed, had chosen pistols as the weapons, and, as regarded conditions, twenty-five paces distance, and to fire as either opponent chose. The seconds, all well-known men and accustomed to affairs of the kind, were, on Thauziat's side, the Baron Trésorier and the Marquis de Beaulieu, and, on Hérault's, Colonel Gandon (his cousin) and Pierre Delarue. They had made every effort to obtain Louis' consent for the shots to be exchanged at the word of command, but he firmly refused, and they were forced to give way and accept the conditions imposed.

They were ignorant of the real cause of the quarrel. Louis had told his friends that Clément had deeply insulted him, and Clément had merely told his seconds to place him entirely at his adversary's disposal. Still Thauziat was so good a shot that it was not in his interest that his representatives had attempted to lessen the severity of the conditions, but in his opponent's. Firing at word of command, Louis had a chance—as it was, he was already a dead

man. At least that was what was said, and what Emilie had heard her father repeat.

In her terror, Mademoiselle Lereboulley had hastened to Hélène, who briefly, and with an awful calmness, explained to her the cause of the duel. If her husband had been going to wear an invulnerable suit of armour, she could not have seemed more certain of seeing him return in safety.

She passed the evening before the encounter in her chamber alone with Emilie, stilling her friend's fears by her enthusiastic faith.

"God is just," she said, "and He cannot mean to lay a greater burden of sorrow upon me than I can bear. Every morning and evening for the last two years I have implored Him to give me back the man I love, and since He has not allowed me to despair, would He take him from me just as misfortune may be about to restore him to me chastened and repentant? No, He never forsakes those who trust in Him, and He has accepted the sacrifice of my sorrows, He has seen my resignation. As a reward for my suffering He owes me my husband's life, and He will give it me."

She spoke in a quiet, tranquil voice, and with a conviction which was well calculated to inspire fears for her reason if the result should be fatal to her husband.

At midnight she asked her friend to leave her, at the same time begging her to return early in the morning, for Louis was to go away at nine o'clock. Then, when she was alone, she installed herself in a room which was between her husband's bedroom and her son's, leaving the door open, as though she wished to surround the father with the inviolable charm which emanated from the innocence of the child.

Until daylight she prayed in silence. When she heard Louis moving, she went into his room and talked to him, enduing his wounded heart with confidence, imparting to him courage, and arousing his pride. As he gazed at her with humble admiration, he longed to cry aloud the word which, at this critical hour, rang in his heart—pardon; but he dared not, he felt too guilty. And she, in her heroic determination to hide her agony, found strength enough to smile. She knew that if she gave way for a single instant she would become a prey to an anxiety which would at once unnerve her husband and be fatal to him, and as she wished him to be calm, firm, and master of himself, she did as she had always done—set him the example.

But, just as his seconds came for him, she fetched from his bed little Pierre, who had just awoke, and placed him in his father's arms, holding them both under the spell of her glance, as though to bind them to each other so closely that nothing could break the bond sealed by her will.

"Kiss papa," she said, "and say '*au revoir*' to him."

"*Au revoir*," repeated the little one, in his sweet, clear voice, while he stroked his father's neck with his chubby hands.

A shudder passed through Louis' frame, and his eyes filled with tears. Hélène took the child from him, convulsively pressed him to her, then said—

"Now go."

And without a sigh, without a moan, she saw him leave, and stood at the window watching him until she had seen him get into the carriage. Then, when the rolling of the wheels could be no longer distinguished amidst the noise of

the streets, she returned to her own room, and, her strength utterly exhausted, burst into sobs.

A moment afterwards Emilie came and mingled her tears with her friend's, and they sat together an hour, neither speaking a word, as they listened in the silence to the ticking of the clock which in all probability was telling the last seconds of the existence of one of the two combatants. Emilie's heart was torn between her affection for Louis and her affection for Thauziat, and she tried not to look forward to the result, determined not to choose between him who had been the friend of her childhood and him whom she had loved above all his fellow-men, for she had a superstitious fear of in some way influencing their fate if she made any mental preference.

At ten o'clock Hélène breathed a sigh, and murmuring, "They are facing each other now," fell on her knees. Emilie remained seated, her face hollow with anguish, her ear strained to catch the least noise which might be a sign of the result, her heart beating so quickly that its throbbing almost suffocated her, and the hour which was then passing was a martyrdom for both women. The decree had been pronounced, and they were ignorant of what it entailed. At half-past ten Hélène, no longer able to restrain her agitation, went downstairs, opened a window, and leant out. In her impatience to know, she longed to go out into the street, to rush to meet the news, and yet, at the same time, she was so afraid of what she might learn, that she could have shut herself up in total darkness that she might see and hear nothing. At eleven o'clock, Emilie, who until then had said nothing, became almost distracted, and cried :

“Ah, what is happening? It is wicked to keep us so long in ignorance! All must be over by now!”

She was almost swooning, but Hélène never glanced at her friend; her eyes were fixed on the entrance-door, as though attracted by a magnetic force, and thus she awaited either life or death. At last she uttered a cry which thrilled Emilie to the very soul, such was the fierce triumphant ring in it—

“It is he! It is he! He is living! God has restored him to me!”

She had not the strength to move a single step or to say one word more, and clinging to the curtains for support, she stood watching her husband, who was slowly walking towards the house, supported by his seconds and the Baron Trésorier.

And as she saw him thus pale and weak, a horrible hope entered Emilie’s heart—if Hérault was wounded, Thauziat must be safe.

The four men were now quite close to the house, and Louis’ face could be seen ghastly pale, his features drawn, his lips contracted, and his eyes staring. His right arm, which he could not move, was in a large black sling, and his overcoat was thrown loosely over him to hide the disorder of his blood-stained clothes. With difficulty he mounted the steps, almost carried by Colonel Gandon and Pierre Delarue, and when he entered the door he fell nearly fainting into Hélène’s arms.

“What imprudence!” she exclaimed. “Why did he walk? Why not have let the carriage go for him?”

“Your husband refused to do so for fear of frightening you, madame,” answered Delarue. “He wanted you to see he was able to walk.”

Louis tried to speak, but Hélène gently placed her hand before his mouth, and Trésorier whispered—

“Do not let us delay in putting him to bed. He is dangerously wounded, the ball has fractured the shoulder, and Rameau de Ferrière will be here in a few minutes to make another examination.”

Hélène left her husband for a moment to go over to the baron and ask in trembling tones—

“And his adversary?”

Trésorier lowered his head and answered but one word—

“Killed.”

At this terrible announcement they heard a moan, and Emilie, paler than Louis, and almost as cold as his dead antagonist, stood before the bearer of the gloomy tidings. The baron turned to her and bowing before her—

“I was going to your house, mademoiselle,” he said. “Before the duel took place, Monsieur Thauziat placed in my hands a letter which I was to return to him if fate was in his favour, and to give to you if it was against him. I am sorry to say, mademoiselle, that it is my duty to deliver it to you.”

Without a word Emilie took the letter he was holding out to her, and, passing like a shadow from the hall, entered the dining-room, where, free at last to give vent to her anguish, she fainted away. When she regained her senses, her eyes still dim fell on the letter she was grasping in her clenched hand. She tore open the envelope, unfolded the paper, and then wept bitterly as she recognised the firm, clear writing that had been traced by the hand which would never move again. She dried her tears, and, eager to know what message the man she had so

devotedly loved had sent her from beyond the tomb, she read—

“ I have passed the night, my dear Emilie, in making the moral and material preparations necessitated by the grave combat which is about to take place. I have put my affairs in order and I have submitted my conscience to a strict examination. The first task was more quickly finished than the second. I found it far easier to settle my worldly accounts than to settle those of my soul, and the struggle I have had with myself has been long and painful. The judge was severe, but the accused made an energetic defence, and it was long before the sentence was pronounced but—it condemns me. I have acted wickedly, and you were right when you told me I was doing so, but I was carried away by my passion, and it was a bad counsellor. Three times have I felt the spirit of evil take possession of me and deaden my sense of right and wrong. In vain did I struggle amidst the shadows and firmly resolve to direct my steps towards the light—the light which is truth and justice. A force stronger than my will—my rebellious animal instincts—held me back and forced me to commit three shameful, dishonourable actions. The first was placing my hand in that of the man I hated ; the second, frequenting his house to rob him of his honour ; and the third, making a cowardly use of my strength against a woman. Each time I knew I was committing a crime, each time I persisted in my course. The attraction of evil outweighed the protestations of my revolted conscience, and I have been compelled to suffer the twofold torture of hating my fault and yet committing it.

“ And even now that I am at death’s threshold able to

see at once the past which can never be recalled, and the future which might have been, though I have sufficient strength to condemn my conduct, I am not strong enough to repent. At the very moment that I may be about to leave the world, my heart leaps, my flesh quivers at the thought that, though at the price of a crime, the woman I adore might have been mine, and I curse the fate which has placed that woman on my path, and yet has not permitted me to clasp her in my arms and make of her the joy of my existence. Oh, how I have loved her, and how at this instant I do still love her! She has never had an idea of my immense affection for her—affection which I have been unable to prove to her by my life, but which I am going to try and prove to her by my death. For she has decided between her husband and myself. The love she bears to him outstrips the love I have for her. You, who are always right, forewarned me that I should be vanquished in the struggle I had commenced against fidelity and goodness, and I have nothing more to do but pay my ransom, and I will pay it royally by giving my rival his life and happiness to her by whom he is beloved. In the duel which is to take place to-morrow, Louis will be at my mercy, but I have determined to spare him. I will not be the cause of another tear to her who has suffered too much already; I have resolved to put an end to her martyrdom and to become her ally against her enemies. Unfortunately I know Louis too well not to be sure that the only remedy for his absurd passion is a separation from the object of it—a ball in the shoulder, three weeks' pain, a little blood lost, and he would think no more of Lady Olifaunt. I will administer this cure. Wounded, he will inspire more

sympathy and words of pardon will more easily rise from the heart to the lips of her he has so foolishly neglected. Now, my task is finished. I owe nothing more to anyone, and at the foot of the terrible debit and credit account I had opened I have just written : even.

“And now I want to think of no one but you, you who have been my sincere, devoted, and affectionate friend, and who will regret me, I am sure, although I have been a cause of suffering to you. You gave me one day the greatest proof of esteem a woman can possibly give a man ; you came to me with outstretched hand, saying—‘ Will you take me as your wife ? ’ Alas ! I was not worthy of you, as I have but too well proved. Forgive me the grief I have caused you, and be convinced that your name will be the last I shall utter in this world. When I am no more, come sometimes to see me where I shall lie sleeping in eternal silence and repose. I have always loved flowers, bring me some—nothing is more melancholy than a neglected tomb. And if some essence of myself still dwells beneath the stone, I shall hear your light footstep, I shall recognise the murmur of your voice, and my night will be less sombre, my sleep less stony.

“ But day is breaking—the last one of my life. I send you a hundred kisses. Adieu.”

With trembling fingers Emilie folded up the letter and placed it next her heart. Her eyes were dry and there was not a tear-drop on her cheeks. She rose, rang the bell, asked for her cloak and hat, and, without going to see *Hélène*, left the house.

A quarter of an hour later she was at *Thauziat's* house. The door was wide open, the hall empty, and she went

straight upstairs and into the drawing-room, where, seated at a table, was the Marquis de Beaulieu, giving some orders to Clément's confidential valet. He rose respectfully when he saw Mademoiselle Lerehoulley.

"You wish to see him?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes," she replied.

He raised a *portière*, then stood on one side to allow Emilie to pass, and when the heavy curtain fell behind her she found herself alone in Thauziat's bedroom. Stretched on the bed lay Clément fully dressed, the red silk counterpane heightening by its contrast the pallor of his face. His eyes were closed, his lips fixed in a smile as if he were hurling a last defiance at existence, and his hands were lying open and straight down beside him. He had apparently passed away easily and without a struggle, almost as though he were inviting death. A silver candelabra placed beside him threw its light upon his proud and noble features, and there was no trace of blood, no stain; he had died as he had lived, with every refinement.

Emilie drew near to the bedside, gazed long and earnestly upon the dead face, that its image might be imprinted ineffaceably upon her heart, then, bending down, she laid her lips upon the forehead which no longer masked an active brain. A moment after she almost shrieked aloud. She fancied that Clément's eyelids had moved in a rapid vibration, and that an almost imperceptible quiver had passed over his face, as if the kiss she had just given him had rekindled a last spark of life within him. But slowly a violet shadow crept over his temples, and bound them with a crown of mourning. Then, with a sob, she fell upon her knees and prayed.

As Emilie had once said, it had needed the white-hot iron to heal Louis' gangrened heart. Stretched upon a bed of pain, consumed by agonising anxieties, afraid to question either his wife, whose gentleness, calmness, and firmness were never-failing, or his grandmother, whose sorrowful tenderness cut him to the heart, the unhappy Hérault suffered less acutely from his physical ills than from his mental torments. His wound, which was a bad one, had soon begun to heal under the skilful treatment it received, but when would the sore in his heart close up?

He had wasted and squandered all the gifts fate had lavished upon him with so bountiful a hand. He had betrayed the confidence of his grandmother, he had been false to his wife, and he had dissipated the wealth amassed by his father, and which he ought to have held in trust for his son. In his folly he had thrown all to the winds. And he did not receive one reproach. His grandmother moved quietly about his room, talking in whispers to his wife, and the child played on the floor, with silvery bursts of laughter. In spite of his guilt, he had been deprived of none of his privileges or his rights, and, as in the past, he was loved and respected. But were not all these favours simply granted to him because he was ill? Perhaps not this kindness and this gentleness were merely inspired by pity.

During the long sleepless hours when he lay motionless, fearing to awake his wife, who slept in the next room, he thought of all he had done, and the past few months seemed like a horrible nightmare. Had he not been mad? Could it be really he who had committed so many base and cowardly actions for the sake of a creature of whose vicious nature he was perfectly aware? In com-

parison with himself, Thauziat seemed innocent, and often during the night did his dead friend's pale face appear to him, not threatening or terrible, but sad and gentle. The vision was so real that Louis thought Clément was indeed before him, and he longed to speak to him, but was afraid. Then he became feverish, and tossed restlessly from side to side, and in the morning they found him pale and shuddering. But once, by the light of the night-lamp, he saw Thauziat leaning over him, gazing anxiously at him, as if he were watching the progress the invalid made towards health, and found it far too gradual. The phantom was so near, that, raising himself with tremendous effort, Louis tried to grasp it, but his hands clutched only air. Then, in a voice almost inaudible, he whispered in the silence :

“Forgive me, Clément !”

The shadow placed an icy hand upon the burning forehead of his murderer, and replied—

“I have nothing to forgive you. It was not you who killed me, it was she !”

“Then why do you haunt me thus as soon as night falls ?”

“If the sight of me is distasteful to you, I will show myself no more. But I shall be always near you to protect and guard you, for all that remains of me is still faithful to the only love of my life. Love her dearly you whom she loves, and be happy, as you may be yet.”

He vanished, and Louis saw him no more, but from that hour he improved rapidly, and at the end of six weeks he was well.

At last the day came when Rameau de Ferrière said to his patient :

“Now you can go out and resume your ordinary life ;” and the same afternoon H  l  ne ordered the carriage, and seating herself in it with her husband and old Madame H  rault, told the coachman to go to the factory at Saint-Denis. When they reached the charming house, surrounded by a pretty garden, which had always been occupied by the manager of the works, they left the carriage, and in the office, which was near the entrance, they found Ma  tre Talamon, their lawyer, awaiting them. Then, very gravely, H  l  ne began to speak :

“Dear Louis,” she said, “while you have been unable to see to your affairs, Madame H  rault and I have been obliged to make arrangements by which you may be enabled to discharge your debts. Boissise and the mansion in the Faubourg Poissonni  re must be sold, and we have found purchasers. I shall give up the money you settled upon me at our marriage and so you will be free, while you will still possess the factory which was the instrument by means of which your father and grandfather made their wealth. And now you have only to sign the deeds Ma  tre Talamon has been good enough to bring with him, and all will be finished.”

Louis turned pale, and taking his wife by the hand he drew her to the window :

“Then, this house—”

“Is the one in which we shall live henceforth.”

“And all that I gave you when I married you ?”

“I have refunded. I entered your house poor, poor I shall have left it.”

“But the money I settled upon you is your son’s.”

“To my son nothing can be more precious than his father’s honour.”

Louis raised his tear-filled eyes to the proud, brave, generous-hearted woman beside him, and said :

“ How shall I ever repay you for what you have done ? ”

“ By being an upright, honest, hard-working man,” she replied, with a serene and tranquil glance. And pointing to the factory with its busy workmen and noisy hammers—

“ There lies your salvation. You have destroyed the edifice your grandfather raised. Rebuild it. I will help you.”

“ But can we reconstruct it ? ”

“ We can do everything if we will.”

She led him back to the table. He took up a pen, and with the future she was promising him before him, drew without hesitation a line through the past.

THE END.

